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Immigrants in the Metropolis

Imigranti v metropoli

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Prohlášení

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Key words

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Abstract

Urban spaces have appeared in literature for a long time and they seem to fascinate a lot of contemporary writers. The constructions of cities become exceptionally complex in postcolonial British fiction that portrays urban landscape from the perspective of first and second generation immigrants from Britain's former colonies. All of the novels discussed in this work are set in London and the characters are immigrants of the South Asian and Caribbean diasporas in Britain: the thesis focuses namely on *Brick Lane* (Monica Ali), *White Teeth* (Zadie Smith) and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (Meera Syal). However, the work also makes short digressions to a number of older works which deal with the immigrant experience in London: *The Lonely Londoners* (Sam Selvon), *The Satanic Verses* (Salman Rushdie) and *The Buddha of Suburbia* (Hanif Kureishi). The entire thesis consists of five parts and begins with an introduction to several theoretical terms that are necessary for analyses of immigrant identities and urban spaces. All of the theory that is discussed in the first chapter is then applied to the chosen novels by Ali, Smith and Syal. Overall, the thesis focuses on the ways in which the ex-colonial subjects in the books perceive London according to their gender and the particular generation of immigrants that they come from. It explores the profound differences in male and female perceptions of the urban environment. The thesis also looks at how immigrants in the selected novels interact with the metropolis and how the cultural surroundings that they encounter in London shape their identities and whether they limit them or empower them. Moreover, the thesis is also concerned with the ways in which immigrants map the urban spaces of London by walking around its streets, change particular areas and contribute to the diversity of the whole English capital.

Abstrakt

Městské prostory se v literatuře objevují již velmi dlouho a zdá se, že fascinují i současné spisovatele. Konstrukce měst je obzvláště složitá v postkoloniální britské beletrii, která popisuje městskou krajinu z perspektivy první a druhé generace imigrantů ze zemí bývalých britských kolonií. Všechny romány, které jsou v práci analyzovány, jsou dějově zasazeny do Londýna a jejich postavy jsou přistěhovalci jihoasijské a karibské diaspory v Británii: diplomová práce se soustředí jmenovitě na *Brick Lane* (Monica Ali), *White Teeth* (Zadie Smith) a *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (Meera Syal). Práce ale obsahuje i krátké odbočky, ve kterých se dotýká několika starších děl, která se také soustředí na prožitky imigrantů v Londýně: *The Lonely Londoners* (Sam Selvon), *The Satanic Verses* (Salman Rushdie) a *The Buddha of Suburbia* (Hanif Kureishi). Celá diplomová práce se skládá z pěti částí a je uvedena kapitolou věnovanou teoretickým termínům, které jsou nezbytné k analýzám identit imigrantů a městských prostor. Zmíněná teorie je dále aplikována na vybrané romány od Ali, Smith a Syal. Celkově se diplomová práce soustředí na to, jak postkoloniální subjekty vnímají Londýn v závislosti na své genderové identitě, ale i na příslušnosti ke konkrétní generaci přistěhovalců ze které pochází. Diskuse rozebírá hluboké rozdíly mezi mužským a ženským vnímáním městského prostředí, ale i rozdíly generační. Text analyzuje jak přistěhovalci ve vybraných románech ovlivňují metropoli a jak ona ovlivňuje je, jejich identity, a zda je omezuje nebo jim přináší lepší možnosti. Ovšem diplomová práce si klade za cíl i prozkoumat způsoby, kterými imigranti mapují prostory Londýna za pomocí chůze, mění jednotlivé čtvrti a přispívají k rozmanitosti celého hlavního města Anglie.

Contents

1. Introduction

The literary theorist and intellectual Edward Said declares in the opening chapter of *Culture and Imperialism* that 'none of us is outside or beyond geography', reminding the reader that locations, surroundings and spatial movements throughout time affect all of us.[1] As Said's work stresses, it is particularly in studies of imperialism and postcolonialism where issues of place and territory become essential and these concepts are useful in discussions concerning history, economy and politics as well as in analyses of works of art, including literature. The thesis will deal with geographical concerns in a very specific manner as it will examine literary portrayals of London, a location inhabited by many immigrant subjects from Britain's former colonies, in a number of selected novels of British postcolonial writing published in the 20th and 21st centuries. The focus will be on three texts set in England's capital that were written by contemporary female novelists - *White Teeth* by Zadie Smith, *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* by Meera Syal. Yet, to provide a rich discussion, the work will also make short digressions to some older pieces of literature by other writers, such as Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia.*

As Pramod K. Nayar argues, all writers of postcolonial diasporic literature map experiences that are 'shared by many others, and which they would have expressed if they had had a voice', which also allows us to say that 'there is a constant elision in diasporic narratives between the individual and the communal, the personal and the collective, even when we are being told the story of one individual or family'.[2] Of course, this is also true for Smith, Ali and Syal's fiction. The first of the chosen authors, Zadie Smith, is a contemporary English writer who was born in 1975 in London where she grew up in the north-west suburb of Willesden. Smith is the daughter of a white Englishman and a black Jamaican woman, who moved to London in 1969 at the age of fifteen and married Smith's father six years later.[3] Naturally, this does not only make Smith a mixed race woman but also what we consider a second generation immigrant. Like many famous artists, Smith already showed interest in

[1] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Anchor, 2009) 7.

[2] Pramod K. Nayar, *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction* (London: Anchor, 2009) 188.

[3] Philip Tew, *Zadie Smith* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 27.

various creative activities as a young child - she started producing her very first stories and poems at the age of five and she mostly focused on music and dancing throughout her teenage years.[4] Although she has always been interested in books and writing, it was her decision to study English Literature at King's College, Cambridge that finally gave her the impetus to pursue the career of a professional writer. Due to the immense literary talent that she demonstrated through her short stories that were published in the *May Anthology of Oxford and Cambridge Short Stories* during her studies, Smith received a book deal and published her first novel, *White Teeth,* after her graduation in 2000.[5] The novel was met with great critical success and it 'catapulted her [Smith] from a hopeful first-time novelist to a literary heavyweight': in fact, *White Teeth* remains to be Smith's most famous book to date and it has gained her several significant awards, such as the Whitbread First Novel Award and the International E Book Award.[6] When it comes to novels, Smith has published four popular ones since her debut - *The Autograph Man* (2002), *On Beauty* (2005), *Martha and Hanwell* (2005) and *NW* (2012). However, Smith is also an essayist and produced a whole collection of essays on the topics of literature, cinema and art under the title *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays* in 2009. The most common themes in Smith's writing are multiculturalism, race and identity but she also touches upon issues of aesthetics and politics.

The second author, Monica Ali, is also a black British writer but she was not born in Britain. Ali originally comes from Dhaka in former East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, where she was born in 1967. Ali is the child of a Bangladeshi father and an English mother and she immigrated to Britain with both of her parents in 1971 when a civil war broke out in their home country.[7] When the family fled from East Pakistan for safety, they were only planning to stay in Britain temporarily; however, Ali and her parents never returned to their homeland, Bangladesh.[8] As a result, Ali grew up in Bolton, England where her family settled after immigrating. Ali attended Wadham College, Oxford University, where she studied

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[4] Michael D. Sharp, *Popular Contemporary Writers* (Tarrytown: Marshall Cavendish, 2005) 1302.

[5] Michael D. Sharp, 1302.

[6] Alison Donnell, *Companion to Contemporary Black British Culture* (London: Routledge, 2002) 287.

[7] Knual Chakrabarti and Shubhra Chakrabarti, *Historical Dictionary of the Bengalis* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2013) 42.

[8] Oliver Baum, *Monica Ali's Novel 'Brick Lane': A Critical Reflection of Post-Colonialism* (Munich: GRIN Verlag, 2014) 4.

politics, philosophy and economics and, unlike Smith, she did not pursue the career of a professional writer during or immediately after her studies.[9] After her graduation, Ali worked in marketing, design and publishing before she finally decided to start writing for a living.[10] Ali is now an established novelist and she is best known for her debut novel, *Brick Lane*, that came out in 2003. Indeed, *Brick Lane* became immensely successful after its publication and it was shortlisted for many literary awards, including the Booker Prize, the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in Britain, the Guardian First Book Award and the George Orwell Price for Political Writing.[11] Ali has published two more novels since her first literary success - *In The Kitchen* (2009) and *Untold Story* (2011), as well as a book of short stories called *Alentejo Blue* (2006). Similarly to Smith, Ali is known for her interest in writing about the themes of multiculturalism and struggles with identity in Britain. In fact, as Sunita Sinha argues, 'British critics have called her [Ali] the next Zadie Smith presumably because they are both young, non-white females who blasted onto the literary scene with Booker-nominated bestsellers about immigrant culture in London'.[12]

The last author that must be introduced is Meera Syal. Syal was born in the city of Wolverhampton in England in 1961. Her parents both immigrated to England from New Delhi and raised their daughter in Essington. Syal studied English and drama at Manchester University, which prepared her for her career as a writer as well as for her first job as an actress at the Royal Court Theatre.[13] Unlike Smith and Ali's, Syal's career is very diverse because she has worked on many different projects - she is an actress, writer, comedienne and producer too. When it comes to her ambitions as a novelist, Syal has published two novels that are both acclaimed pieces of British postcolonial literature - *Anita and Me* (1996) and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999), the former of which was inspired by the author's childhood. Moreover, *Anita and Me* won the Betty Trask Awards and was shortlisted for the 1996

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[9] Baum, 4.

[10] Mark Stein, *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004) 186.

[11] Ruth Maxey, 'Monica Ali's *Brick Lane,*' *British Asian Fiction: Framing the Contemporary,* eds. Neil Murphy and Wai-chew Sim (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2008) 219.

[12] Michael Perfect, *Contemporary Fictions of Multiculturalism: Diversity and the Millennial London Novel* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan) 129.

[13] Susan Osborne, *Bloomsbury Essential Guide for Reading Groups* (London: A & C Black, 2002) 185.

Guardian Fiction Award.[14] Yet Syal seems to be famous especially for the work that she has done for film and television - among many other pieces, she created scripts for the comedy series *Tandoori Nights* in the 1980s, wrote a drama called *My Sister Wife* (1994) for the BBC and produced *Masala FM* (1996) and the series called *Goodness Gracious Me* (1996-1998) for the radio.[15] In addition, she has written several screenplays, including the female-driven film *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) and the film and television adaptations of her very own novels: *Anita and Me* was made into a film in 2002 and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* became a television series in 2005. Like Smith and Ali, Syal usually works with the themes of multiculturalism, race and problems of identity, all of which reoccur in her writing. In 1998, Syal was made a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire for her services to the arts and she received the title of Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire from Queen Elizabeth II for her contribution to drama and literature in 2015.[16]

Due to their cultural origins, Ali, Smith and Syal have gathered observations as well as personal experiences on what it means to live in London as a first or second generation immigrant and the realities that these people have faced in the metropolis are reflected in their writing. However, the images that the writers create in their books cannot be easily labelled as 'authentic' because, although inspired by genuine experiences of minorities, they still remain to be fictional expressions. Moreover, it is also often difficult to speak of authenticity in postcolonial writing because of the type of people it represents. We have to keep in mind that the texts deal with located identities and that, as a result, they portray characters who always reconstruct themselves according to their current spatial surroundings. Therefore, by creating complex characters whose identities are in constant flux, postcolonial writing challenges the idea that there could ever exist such a thing as an 'authentic identity'. Yet *White Teeth*, *Brick Lane* and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* are great examples of what it might be like to dwell in London when one is racially and ethnically different from the dominant culture of the city. The main goal of this thesis is to discuss the various immigrant constructions and perceptions of London in the aforementioned novels and to employ gender and generation as factors in experiences of the urban space. Nevertheless, in order to provide such analysis of the

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[14] Amitava Kumar, *Away: The Indian Writer as an Expatriate* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 394.
[15] Osborne, 185.
[16] Donnell, 291.

primary texts, it is necessary to work with a number of theoretical concepts, all of which must be introduced first.

Defined as 'the movement, migration, or scattering of a people away from an established or ancestral homeland', diaspora is certainly a key term for the discussion because it produces what Salman Rushdie aptly calls 'displaced persons'.[17] As apparent from its definition, diaspora is an incredibly broad term and since it has both spatial and temporal dimensions, it is applicable to a wide range of groups of people around the world at various points in time. For that reason, it must be specified that due to the chosen texts by Smith, Ali and Syal, which portray mostly Bangladeshi, Indian and Jamaican immigrants living in London, this work is primarily concerned with the South-Asian and Caribbean diasporas in Britain. Historically, a great number of immigrants of various nationalities, races and ethnicities who came to live in Britain from its former colonies settled in its capital. During this process, which is sometimes referred to as 'reinvasion of the centre' because it describes the movement of people from the margins to the administrative heart of the British Empire, immigrants attempted to start new lives in the metropolis by which they automatically transformed it into a diasporic location.[18] Therefore, it is possible to claim that while Britain's colonial rule once changed the globe, the people of the countries it once controlled have managed to transform the erstwhile coloniser, along with its largest city, in return.

Yet this 'colonisation in reverse', as the Jamaican poet Louise Bennett calls the effects of diaspora in one of her poems, brought significant changes into the lives of the immigrants too.[19] For most, Britain's capital quickly became a place that problematised their understandings of roots and home. It must be noted that the concept of 'home' is always dual in diasporic contexts: as Avtar Brah claims, home is the original homeland that becomes 'a place of no return', 'a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination' but it is also 'the lived experience of a locality'.[20] Naturally, the immigrants then oscillate between two vastly

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[17] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta Books, 1992) 124. 'Diaspora,' Merriam-Webster.com, Merriam-Webster, Web. 18 September 2014.

[18] John Clement Ball, *Imagining London: Postcolonial Fiction and the Transnational Metropolis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004) 4.

[19] Ball, 4.

[20] Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996) 192.

different locations in their thoughts - London and the places that they were born and raised in but that they will very unlikely visit again, such as Jamaica, India or Bangladesh in the novels chosen for this project. Interestingly, due to such feelings of rootlessness, immigrants often choose to adopt hyphenated identities and prefer to call themselves British-Asians or British-Caribbeans rather than identifying, for example, simply as British, Jamaican, Indian or Bangladeshi. Moreover, this straddling between two places, and therefore cultures, is not typical only for the first generation migrants but also for their children born in the host country. Indeed, the second generation's perceptions of Britain and London can be, to some extent, influenced by their parents' stories about homelands, longings for return and sometimes by the general cultural upbringing in their families too. Nevertheless, the specific differences the generational gap creates in attitudes to the postcolonial metropolis shall be discussed later in this chapter.

In her book *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, Brah argues that the diaspora space, such as London, becomes 'the point at which the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of 'us' and 'them' are contested'.[21] This state of dislocation and tension that immigrants recognise in the metropolis relates to the experience of hybridity, which is another concept that is essential for the discussions of Ali, Smith and Syal's writing.[22] As Marwan M. Kraidy argues, hybridity 'has entered many academic arenas, ranging from traditional disciplines like literature, anthropology, and sociology to interdisciplinary venues such as postcolonial theory and performance studies' - therefore, like diaspora, hybridity is a very broad term and it must be further defined.[23] For the purposes of this thesis, we have to understand hybridity as 'the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonisation'.[24] More specifically, in our analysis, the term stands for the mingling of British with South-Asian or Caribbean cultural aspects within immigrant characters based in London. Naturally, this includes possible mixtures of races in

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[21] Brah, 208.

[22] Stephen Spencer, *Race and Ethnicity - Second Edition: Culture, Identity and Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2014) 237.

[23] Marwan M. Kraidy, *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalization* (New Delhi: Temple University Press, 2005) 2.

[24] Bill Ashcroft, et al., *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 1998) 96.

individuals as well as combinations of various habits, religions and languages, which essentially influence their personalities and how such people look at London itself. Therefore, as Gregory Castle argues, 'the hybrid subject is … forced to speak from multiple, typically antagonistic locations'.[25] The theory of hybridity in postcolonial studies is connected to the name of Homi K. Bhabha who in his own work also introduces the idea of mimicry as a kind of a hybridising process.[26] Indeed, Bhabha claims that mimicry is a part of the hybrid condition and defines it as 'the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite'.[27] To Bhabha, mimicry is not a question of being in harmony with the dominant culture but it is a form of camouflage: to perform mimicry is to adopt the dominant culture of the place where the hybrid immigrant lives, such as London, and to create copies of it.[28] Nevertheless, such copies are exaggerations - they are not perfect duplications but it is argued that sometimes they may have a potential to subvert the hegemonic culture.

How then are experiences of diaspora, hybridity, mimicry, hyphenated identities and generational differences reflected in perceptions of the postcolonial metropolis? What does London mean to people with such complex identities and how do they experience it and re-map its spaces? In order to begin answering these questions, we must bind the aforementioned concepts with further theories of the city and urban space that are relevant to postcolonial fiction. First of all, it is important to stress that since there are many different diasporas, there are also many reactions to the city. That is to say, it is never possible to claim that the vision of the metropolis is the same for all groups of immigrants no matter what their country of origin and background is. Indeed, as John McLeod argues, we may find parallels when analysing various immigrant perceptions but we have to keep in mind that, for instance, 'the factors which affected the arrival and fortunes of Caribbeans in London is not necessarily commensurate with that of South Africans, Australians or South-Asians'; similarly then, 'different London neighbourhoods … open vistas on the city which do not readily aggregate

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[25] Gregory Castle, *The Blackwell Guide to Literary Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007) 139.

[26] Kraidy, 53.

[27] Homi K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994) 122.

[28] Bhabha, 122.

into a common view of London'.[29] To paraphrase McLeod, London is a multitude. It is a complex space and the experience and visions of the metropolis can never be completely generalised because of its many faces and a mixture of inhabitants that originally come from all over the world. Consequently, since there are many Londons and Londoners in the period after decolonisation, any work of postcolonial literature can easily combine a number of outlooks on the metropolis.

In his book *Imagining London,* Ball introduces two basic spatial views of the capital that appear in postcolonial writing. As he claims, immigrants can see London as a local 'symbolic site representing England's former imperial hegemony' but also as a global place, a 'postimperial contact zone'.[30] If postcolonial subjects view the city and its spaces as the reflection of Britain's power and colonial rule, their everyday life there may produce negative feelings because the urban landscape and the white population around them serve as a reminder of the larger national and cultural oppression that Britain caused in their original homelands in the past. In comparison, the view of London as a contact zone means that the city, while still seen as a product of imperialism, is considered to be 'the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations'.[31] At first, this may seem like a positive outlook on the city and an aspect that helps multiculturalism flourish but, as Mary Louise Pratt warns us in her definition of the term, the relations that the contact zone creates are often full of conflicts and inequality.[32] Nevertheless, at this point it is necessary to focus on the simple fact that there are two spatial scales of London and that these are inseparable for immigrants because the local and the global are always intertwined. Indeed, as Ball claims, 'the city as physical fact must be locally lived in' but at the same time 'the city as a cluster of global-scale associations must be mentally processed' and 'imaginatively inhabited'.[33]

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[29] John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism and Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis* (London: Routledge, 2004) 4.

[30] Ball, 15.

[31] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 8.

[32] Pratt, 8.

[33] Ball, 18.

The spatial views of London are inherently connected in many works of postcolonial fiction to what we may consider to be examples of resistance to the city. In other words, if an immigrant character perceives the capital as a location of inequality or as a reflection of past imperial power, it is natural that they have tendencies to confront it by any means available to them. In some specific cases, ex-colonials may resist London by projecting it into objects of small scale so that they can literally grasp the city in their hands and for a moment feel like they are in control of it but they may also resist the city by openly criticising it and, most importantly, by coming to live in it - by the act of relocation.[34] As Joseph McLaughlin claims, the literature of the urban 'jungle' describes 'an imaginative domain' that 'calls forth … exploring, conquering' or 'enlightening' and it is true that such acts play a huge part in resisting the city by relocation in novels of postcolonial writing.[35] In many ways, immigrants who live in London reterritorialise the capital by moving around and observing its spaces from their hybrid perspectives as an act of resistance. In fact, reterritorialisation in postcolonial writing is a great example of how the immigrant condition may serve as a source of cosmopolitan creativity: according to Vanessa Guignery, who draws on the ideas of Salman Rushdie, 'immigrants can try and make London visible again, since it has long been 'ignored, not looked at - in fact unseen' by non-immigrants; the migrant thus proposes fresh ways of re-mapping the metropolis and redefining its contours, which are not only physical but also imaginary'.[36]

The concepts of reterritorialisation and deterritorialisation have been theorised by Gilles Deleuze and Pierre-Félix Guattari. Although Deleuze and Guattari work with the concept of the nomad, we can relate their theory to contemporary literature due to the fact that 'the life of a nomad is *intermezzo*', living in-between various oppositions exactly like the immigrants of the present day.[37] In fact, the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari can be applied in diasporic contexts because for them the term 'deterritorialisation' denotes 'destabilisation of

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[34] Ball, 9.

[35] Joseph McLaughlin, *Writing the Urban Jungle: Reading Empire in London from Doyle to Eliot* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000) 3.

[36] Vanessa Guignery, *(Re-)mapping London: Visions of the Metropolis in the Contemporary Novel in English* (Paris: Éditions Publibook, 2008) 15.

[37] Gary Genosko, *Deleuze and Guattari: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 2001) 1173.

links between culture and territory', which is a very common phenomenon that appears when people move around the world to settle in countries far away from their homelands.[38] As the French philosophers claim, 'deterritorialisation …. has reterritorialisation as its flipside and complement', and therefore we certainly cannot separate one from the other in our discussion.[39] For example, with Deleuze and Guattari's theory in mind, it can be claimed that any person or character who immigrates takes with them a whole set of cultural practices typical for their territory and then reterritorialises them in their new location.[40] Consequently, as Virinder Kalra et al. argue, 'many diasporic groups can be called deterritorialised because their collective claims to an identity do not depend upon residence on a particular plot of land'.[41] In essence, what is important to stress here is the fact that the segregated and racially oppressed immigrants may resist the city they live in by using the concept of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation because it allows them to lay claims to parts of the urban space. To paraphrase, various streets and neighbourhoods of London that are inhabited by immigrants in the chosen novels for this project can be collectively remapped because the characters have the capacity to deterritorialise and reterritorialise, which allows them to change parts of the capital in such ways that they become reminiscent of their original homelands - linguistically, religiously or culturally.

The refreshing perceptions of the English capital portrayed in postcolonial literature are discussed by many critics, including Ball, who claims the following:

> […] One thing that can be said of all postcolonial narratives set wholly or partly in London is that their characters … appropriate and imaginatively reinvent the city as a function of their individual and communal experiences of arriving, dwelling, *walking* [my emphasis], working, interacting, observing, responding, and describing.[42]

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[38] Maja Mikula, *Key Concepts in Cultural Studies* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) 48.

[39] Gilles Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Continuum, 2004) 60.

[40] Rosina Márquez Reiter and L. Martín Rojo, *A Sociolinguistics of Diaspora: Latino Practices, Identities, and Ideologies* (London: Routledge, 2014) 6.

[41] Virinder Kalra et al., *Diaspora and Hybridity* (London: SAGE Publications, 2005) 32.

[42] Ball, 10.

The activity of walking around the city has been present in literature for hundreds of years and it also has been theorised. The concept of exploring the city on foot is usually referred to as flânerie, which is a French word that stands for the act of strolling, but the term also appears in similar forms in other European languages: for example, in the Scandinavian language 'flana' means 'to run dizzily around' and in Italian 'far flanella' means 'to walk around without any aim'.[43] According to James Werner, already in the late 18th and early 19th century Europe, flânerie was seen as 'an appropriate … mode of viewing and negotiating the complexities of the city' and the flâneur is generally 'one of the most fascinating figures to have appeared, disappeared and subsequently reappeared in the landscape of Western culture.[44] Nevertheless, the notion of the flâneur was originally only tied to 19th century Paris, therefore 'a specific time and place', and in literature and theory it strictly designated 'writers, poets and intellectuals that critically observed people's behaviour while strolling among the crowd'.[45] Naturally, flânerie soon spread and became applicable to explorers of different cities all around the world including London and we can see examples of it in postcolonial literature too.

The concept of the flâneur is very often discussed in connection to the German philosopher Walter Benjamin who was interested in the figure in both everyday life as well as in the works of Charles Baudelaire.[46] In Benjamin's thought, the flâneur is solitary; it is a character who is 'wallowing in the proliferating stimuli of urban European modernity' and a 'leisurely and seemingly indolent consumer of metropolitan sights, a connoisseur of 'urban enchantments''.[47] Moreover, it must be stressed that the term flâneur originates as a gendered term: flânerie developed as an exclusively male phenomenon and, as a result, its first theorists worked with a man in mind for years. Nevertheless, since the novels chosen for this thesis were written in the 20th and 21st century and include many significant female characters,

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[43] Giampaolo Nuvolati, 'The Flâneur: A Way of Walking, Exploring and Interpreting the City,' *Walking in the European City: Quotidian Mobility and Urban Ethnography,* eds. Evrick Brown and T. Shortell (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014) 21.

[44] James Werner, *American Flaneur: The Cosmic Physiognomy of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 1.

[45] Giampaolo Nuvolati, 21.

[46] Beatrice Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (New York: Continuum, 2006) 89.

[47] Ball, 135.

we have to consider the theory of flânerie in relation to contemporary literature and to the female sex. It was the feminists of the 1980s who started to question the social limitations of the activity and, as Beatrice Hanssen argues, 'a key argument was whether the concept of the flâneur offers a subject position for women or whether the flâneur's gaze over public space is a 'male gaze': patriarchal, 'panoptical' and controlling'.[48] Nowadays we know that although the flâneuse used to be virtually nonexistent in writing for a long time she has existed for years and she is present in works of literature because with the rise of feminism, many women have managed to transgress their role of the observed and became observers. That is to say, the contemporary flânerie differs from its original definitions by Benjamin and others in the fact that it includes both men and women. While flânerie ceases to be a strictly male activity, the role of the flâneur/flâneuse in the city still remains to be that of a critical observer. However, the figure also changes in some aspects when it loses its gender limitations: for years women were strictly connected with the private sphere and men with the public one but when the concept of flânerie finally becomes ungendered, many writers begin to use the flâneur/flâneuse as a person 'in between oppositions … such as private and public, observer and observed, acting and being acted upon' and turn it into 'an interface between the real and the symbolic city'.[49]

Furthermore, another difference between the original definition and the contemporary outlook on flânerie is that the flâneur or the flâneuse 'does not fully engage with the outer world but views it from a distant and sometimes estranged perspective'; in addition, according to Guignery, the observers of the urban space are sometimes 'deranged and disturbed individuals' and they withdraw into their 'own private space of imagination' but some may have the capacity to observe their 'surroundings with relish'.[50] Indeed, in postcolonial writing set in London, we witness many 'estranged' and 'disturbed' flâneurs and flâneuses, mainly because these characters filter urban experiences through their hybridity, which can be both isolating but also a creative and enjoyable position. In comparison to Benjamin's concept, which sees flânerie as wandering through the city 'simply looking at the urban spectacle' in

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[48] Hanssen, 90.

[49] Caroline Rosenthal, *New York and Toronto Novels after Postmodernism* (Rochester: Camden House, 2011) 67.

[50] Guignery, 16.

order to experience 'the deep and real nature of objects, especially objects of art', the estranged contemporary flâneur/flâneuse's relationship to the city, such as London, is not based only on such consumption of the urban space. In fact, not only that immigrants feel like outsiders in their location but their flânerie is often an attempt to make some sense of their identity and belonging.[51]

This naturally brings us to further discussion of moving through space in relation to gender. The French scholar Michel de Certeau was deeply interested in the concept of walking in the city itself and created an analogy between the activity of urban strolling and speech acts. De Certeau claims that 'the act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered' because while the 'speech act actualises language, walking actualises the urban'.[52] That means, as foreshadowed on the previous pages, that all pedestrians articulate and construct the metropolis according to their own personal life histories and cultural backgrounds. However, we have to keep in mind that gender plays a big role in everyday dwelling in the city too. Indeed, gender is an important factor in how characters in postcolonial writing get to look at their surroundings because, as Gillian Creese argues, 'neighbourhoods, workplaces, schools, shops, and street corners' are 'gendered, classed, racialised and sexualised spaces that people move through as they define and redefine their subjectivities and sense of belonging'.[53] That is to say, since spaces are gendered, there are sites in London that may be inhabited, visited or simply walked through by men more often than women and the other way around. For example, women used to be, but in some cultures or families still are, associated mostly with the domestic sphere while men historically never recognised similar restraint. Of course, among the reasons for gender restrictions in postcolonial fiction may be adherence to culturally and socially constructed gender roles from the immigrant's original homeland, gender inequality or oppression and it depends on each individual whether they find a way to transgress them in their new location

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[51] J. Ankor and S. Wearing, 'The Concepts of Gaze,' *The Host Gaze in Global Tourism*, eds. Omar Moufakkir and Y. Reisinge (Wallingford: CABI, 2013) 180.

[52] Ben Highmore, *Michel De Certeau: Analysing Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2006) 107.

[53] Gillian Creese, 'From Africa to Canada,' *Interrogating Race and Racism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2007) 356.

or not. However, it is certain that cultural upbringing may have the power to impose spatial limitations on individuals simply because of their gender, which then reflects in their contact with the city or reinscription of the urban space.

Besides gender, generational differences are yet another aspect in postcolonial literature that creates a huge difference in the urban experience of people. The first generation immigrants come to London because they see it as a place of great opportunity and economic growth. However, they are usually not able to navigate the city well and they struggle to find a place in British society. The reason behind the uneasiness that members of the first generation often feel in the metropolis is definitely their clinging to the past and the myth of return mentioned earlier in this introduction. However, the return myth is a product of something much larger than their hybridity and that is the general disillusionment by Great Britain that the immigrants experience due to inequality and racism. As Sabine Nunius claims, many of these disappointed people adopted 'frugal way of life … in order to save enough money for a speedy return' but this would never 'prove satisfactory to their offspring'.[54] In addition, as discussed above, the return to the original homeland for the first generation immigrants is always unlikely. The second generation immigrants accommodate the space of London a lot better than their parents because they are British-born and they are not burdened by the return myth like their parents. Nevertheless, they are necessarily disadvantaged in the metropolis too. Due to their roots and skin colour, the second generation experiences difficulties in their everyday life. Yet, these young people are willing to fight for better days and search for happiness. Therefore, as Ball claims, while the first generation immigrants are 'shown in a kind of spatial and psychological retreat', the second generation's 'urban existence involves not a hardening around the past but rather discovery, emergence, risk, and real-world conflict'.[55]

The last theory that is relevant for our analysis of hybrid characters in the city in the chosen novels is Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque. As Nandini Bhattacharya argues, to Bakhtin 'the carnival sense of the world came into the literature of the modern world through the medium of the Menippean satire' and carnivalisation is 'a process whereby

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[54] Sabine Nunius, *Coping with Difference: New Approaches in the Contemporary British Novel* (2000-2006) (Berlin: LIT. Verlag, 2009) 45.

[55] Ball, 225.

a carnival sense of the world - arising in the ancient and medieval worlds out of a lived, mass experience of festive, and ritual pageantry of carnivals, such as the Saturnalia - was transposed into the language of literature'.[56] London is nowadays often considered to be a carnival city in postcolonial literature because it has become a contact zone where life has been 'taken out of its usual ruts' for many people but also because the metropolis is famous for its incredible polyphony of voices due to the thousands of immigrants who live there.[57] As Bakhtin himself writes about the carnival: 'It belongs to the borderline between art and life. In reality, it is life itself, but shaped according to a certain pattern or play' and 'it is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because *its very idea embraces all the people* [my emphasis].'[58] Therefore, heteroglossia is indeed at heart of the theory of the carnivalesque. Yet Bakhtin's carnival is not only about multivocality - it is also a question of political and social power. According to Constance Coiner, 'carnival, with its various simultaneous activities, is a site in which many of the usual societal impositions of class and order are suspended while the populace participates in multiple ways of parodying or mimicking the dominant culture's behaviour'.[59] In other words, when immigrants or oppressed members of society decide to act out against or mimic the dominant culture of the metropolis, we can talk about carnivalisation. In this case, Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque turns literary London of the postcolonial novels into a stage where various people can perform their identities and create new realities for themselves.[60] It can be noted here that Bakhtin's original discussion of the carnivalesque supposes participation of all people precisely due to the fact that he builds his argument on the pattern of medieval carnivals during which the roles of individuals from various classes were reversed and everybody was engaged in the festivities. Yet many contemporary carnivals do not follow this

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[56] Nandini Bhattacharya, 'Carnival Language and Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*,' *Salman Rushdie: Critical Essays,* eds. Mohit Kumar Ray and R. Kundu (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2006) 71.

[57] Solomon Volkov, *St Petersburg: A Cultural History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995) 401.

[58] Mikhail Mikhaĭlovich Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984) 7.

[59] Constance Coiner, ''No One's Private Ground': A Bakhtinian Reading of Tillie Olsen's *Tell Me a Riddle*,' *Listening to Silences : New Essays in Feminist Criticism,* eds. Elaine Hedges and S. Fisher Fishkin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 71.

[60] Ball, 208.

original pattern anymore. During carnivals of the present day, such as Mardi Gras, we see an obvious separation of participants and observers and it is this exact separation that Bakhtin finds potentially threatening to the original concept of the carnivalesque that he works with: once participants change to observers, the true and subversive carnivalesque ends.

On one hand, we have to realise that in postcolonial literature, location plays a significant role in how one defines one's own identity and, equally, how one's identity is defined by others, including the hegemonic culture. On the other hand, it is also necessary to pay attention to the ways in which postcolonial subjects construct and view the spaces that surround them. That is to say, the way ex-colonials perceive London is deeply intertwined with how the place treats them and what sort of racial, generational and gender limitations it imposes on them. With this hypothesis in mind, the thesis will seek to provide a complex analysis of London in Ali, Smith and Syal's fiction. As mentioned in the beginning, the three novels central to this thesis, that were picked out of the hundreds of works of British postcolonial writing, were chosen for a specific reason: they are all set in London. Nevertheless, they were also chosen because they are all representative of the same time period and illustrate, as Salman Rushdie once said, 'how we [immigrants] all got here [Britain] - from the Caribbean, from the Indian subcontinent…and about what 'here' turned out to be'.[61] Since the main characters of the three novels are immigrants, the books share the above discussed concepts related to the city, diaspora, hybridity and located identities and will allow for an interconnected discussion. The first chapter of the thesis will deal with the portrayal of immigrants and their life in the city in Ali's *Brick Lane*. In particular, the main focus will be on the characters of Nazneem and Chanu but also on some others, such as Karim, Shahana and Bibi. The work will examine their ways of perceiving their life in the British metropolis as well as their outlook on the urban space itself. The second part of the thesis will then discuss the situation of immigrants living in London in Smith's *White Teeth*. In this case, the focus will be on Clara, Samad and Alsana but also on their children. The last chapter will cover the realities of being an immigrant in London in Meera Syal's *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* and the focus will be on the characters of Tania, Sunita and Chila but also on their partners. The perceptions of London in the novels will be compared and contrasted with

[61] George Stade and K. Karbiener, 'Zadie Smith,' *Encyclopedia of British Writers, 1800 to the Present,* 2009 ed.

one another and with some of the additional pieces of literature that are listed at the very beginning of this introduction. In general, the discussion will illustrate how individual characters accept or reject their cultural surroundings and spaces of the city and it will comment on their expectations of London as well as on their actual experience of the metropolis. The thesis will attempt to show that the city, when seen through immigrants' eyes, may become a site of struggle, confusion and desperation as well as a place of opportunity and potential and it will offer a range of ways in which characters in British postcolonial fiction may reimagine the metropolis.

2. *Brick Lane*

Although the majority of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* is set in London, the novel opens with a section set in Mymensingh district, East Pakistan in 1967. Within no more than seven pages, the narrator illustrates the early life of the protagonist, Nazneen: we witness her birth and her struggle to survive without help when she is a weak baby that refuses to feed as well as her obedient reaction when her father chooses a husband for her who will take her to live in England with him when she is only eighteen years old. This short chapter of the novel is crucial not only because it provides us with necessary information about Nazneen's cultural background but also due to the fact that it introduces us to the central principle that rules her life - from the very beginning, Nazneen is depicted as a woman whose life is purely left to fate and who is taught to believe that she always has to wait for the future to reveal itself. This mantra of Nazneen will reappear in the discussion since it is absolutely essential to her character and it influences her development. The story then shifts from East Pakistan to London of 1985 within the same chapter and from this point onwards the plot of *Brick Lane* is fully set in London with the exception of short letters from Nazneen's sister, Hasina, that appear throughout the novel and that talk about her life in Dhaka.

Nazneen is absolutely central to this chapter about *Brick Lane* because she is tied to all of the other characters that appear in the novel. Moreover, the reader only ever sees those characters from her point of view, as if filtered through her eyes. First, it is necessary to briefly comment on Nazneen's initial life conditions, identity and spatial surroundings in order to begin the analysis of her development and her experiences of the city that she lives in. Being born in East Pakistan but moving to the English capital later in her life, Nazneen has to be defined as a first generation immigrant of the South-Asian diaspora in Britain. When the novel begins, she does not speak any English and she is completely dependent on her much older husband, Chanu, who originally came from East Pakistan too. Nazneen believes for a long time that she only accompanies her husband in England and thinks that one day they will both return back to their homeland. The couple rents a flat in the area of Tower Hamlets close to Brick Lane that is widely known for its large South-Asian community and it is in this area of London where Nazneen has to construct her identity or, as Clinton Bennett aptly says, it is where she eventually 'faces the dilemma of what she wants to retain from her upbringing,

both social and religious, and what she wants to adopt from her new environment'.[62] However, as the work will argue later, it takes some time before Nazneen gets to this stage of her life and begins to question her cultural belonging.

As stated in the introduction to this work, the concepts of alienation and isolation in the city are generally very common in the works of postcolonial literature and the previous paragraph indicates that Ali's novel illustrates this experience, among others, through the character of Nazneen living in London. When the story opens, Nazneen has been living in the metropolis for six months but she spends all of her days confined to the space of the flat. Arguably, since the Nazneen that we are introduced to believes that everything must be left to fate, she is a very passive woman and seems to accept her life as her husband plans it for her. That is to say, whenever we see Nazneen, she cooks or cleans and she takes extensive care of her husband when he comes home from his job, she acts according to his wishes and listens to his stories about work, literature, Bangladesh, the British nation or the life in the city. Since she never leaves her home without him to meet any other people, Nazneen has no friends and the only contact she has with others or the metropolis is through her window. She often watches her neighbours and daydreams about 'going downstairs' and 'crossing the yard', for example to enjoy the company of 'the tattoo lady' who sometimes waves at her from the window of her flat.[63] At this point of the narrative, we can already see Nazneen's strong desire to learn English, which would allow her to go outside and socialise. However, her husband, who ironically prides himself on being Westernised, imposes limitations on Nazneen that are nothing but reterritorialisation of practices from his homeland. In other words, Chanu acts according to Deleuze and Guattari's theory of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation in the sense that he keeps some cultural habits from Bangladesh and follows them during his life in a completely different, Western, territory. For example, Chanu discourages Nazneen from pursuing education because he does not think that it is necessary for a woman who is about to become a mother. Moreover, when she mentions going outside, Chanu does not like the idea of his wife leaving their flat because he is worried about what the other immigrants in the area would say if they saw a married Muslim woman walking around on her own. As a result, it is

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[62] Clinton Bennett, *Muslims and Modernity: Current Debates* (London: Continuum, 2005) 195.

[63] Monica Ali, *Brick Lane* (New York: Scribner, 2003) 7.

possible to argue that it is Nazneen's gender and the patriarchal set up of her marriage that puts strong spatial limitations on her in London in the beginning of the novel: since she is a woman, she is only ever expected to fulfil her role of the obedient Muslim wife who stays at home - and indeed, as illustrated above, this is the identity that Nazneen performs when she first moves to England. Interestingly, as John J. Su argues, when Nazneen becomes pregnant, it is not only her gender but also her female body itself that 'limits the kinds of identities she can perform': indeed, her pregnancy restricts her even further from living the life that she wants and experiencing the city the way she desires to - she feels 'trapped inside this body, inside this room, inside this flat, inside this concrete slab of entombed humanity'.[64]

As a result of the restrictions that her sex and gender impose on her in combination with her initial passivity in London, Nazneen knows logically very little about the city or the area that she lives in. In fact, at the beginning of the novel, it is impossible to talk about Nazneen as about a hybrid character in the sense of Bhabha's theory because she is so isolated from the outside world and British culture that her cultural identity stays largely intact for quite a long time. In other words, her character does not initially exemplify any mingling of British with South-Asian cultural aspects. For example, Nazneen's religion and language are still the same as they were when she lived in her village in her homeland before she was married off to Chanu in England. Therefore, the only thing that changes for Nazneen during the first chapters of *Brick Lane* is her physical location, from East Pakistan to Great Britain, rather than her sense of cultural belonging. For Nazneen, true hybridity is something that she has yet to achieve during the course of the novel. However, she cannot become a hybrid before discovering the life outside her house. She has to experience walking down the streets of London, seeing new places, learning some English and talking to other people in the city.

Nazneen's first walk around London on her own, which she undertakes behind her husband's back, is a great and significant event within the context of the book. Interestingly, Nazneen leaves the flat after receiving a letter from her sister Hasina who informs her that she had left her husband and moved to Dhaka, the large capital city of Bangladesh. As Emily Johansen suggests, Nazneen's decision to leave the flat then becomes an attempt 'to mimic -

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[64] John J. Su, *Imagination and the Contemporary Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 102. Ali, 56.

and thereby sympathise with - the disappearance of her younger sister into the chaos of the city'.[65] In other words, she gets the urge to experience what her sister must have gone through. Yet Nazneen's walk through the metropolis can never be the same as Hasina's because Nazneen is an immigrant and she knows that she is an outsider in the city that she lives in. In contrast, Hasina, who moved to Dhaka from a village, might need to get used to the urban environment but she is still in her home country and does not experience any cultural or language barriers. During her first walk, the reader witnesses Nazneen as she observes everything around her and tries to take in the diverse environment of London. She walks down Brick Lane that 'was deserted' and where the streets 'were stacked with rubbish, entire kingdom of rubbish piled high as fortresses' and then beyond Brick Lane, where she continues to explore the nearby area that stands in contrast to the messy and shabby environment in which she and many other immigrants live: she observes 'a building … constructed almost entirely of glass', 'white stone palaces', 'men in dark suits', people who all look like they are 'on a private, urgent mission to execute a precise and demanding plan'.[66] As James F. English argues, it is in this moment when 'Nazneen stumbles from the dirty streets of Brick Lane into the glistening central business district of the capital' when we 'encounter some of the racialised divisions and inequalities of London in the 1980s'.[67] Indeed, in this passage we clearly see the multitude that the metropolis exemplifies and that there are different Londons and many types of Londoners. There are inhabitants of the city, like the protagonist of *Brick Lane*, who do not have much or any access to the type of life that some neighbourhoods in the metropolis offer - whether it is due to their descent, class, race or gender.

In some aspects, the Nazneen that we meet at the beginning of Ali's novel reminds us of Sufyan's wife named Hind in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses.* Like Nazneen, Hind is a first generation South-Asian immigrant in Britain and she performs the role of the submissive wife that accompanies her husband to England from Bangladesh. As Søren Frank claims, Hind too

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[65] Emily Johansen, *Cosmopolitanism and Place: Spatial Forms in Contemporary Anglophone Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 54.

[66] Ali, 39.

[67] James F. English, *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British Fiction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006) 116.

knows what it is like to stay 'in the shadow of her husband' and spends time in the kitchen where she practices 'an eclecticism parallel to her husband's intellectual pluralism'.[68] Moreover, the London that Hind experiences is her neighbourhood, which means that she only gets to see London as 'a demon city' and a dangerous place where the best thing is to 'stay home, not to go out for so much as to post a letter, stay in, lock the door' and 'say your prayers'.[69] In other words, like Nazneen's, Hind's view of the city is incredibly narrow and she does not really know what the city offers beyond the area of her residence or how diverse it can be. Yet, unlike Nazneen, Hind does not exemplify any desire to explore her neighbourhood or other parts of the metropolis - this is a major difference between the two women. In fact, Hind resists the metropolis very strongly. She does this by living according to the cultural practices typical for her original homeland that she reterritorialises in her new location: in London, she surrounds herself with all the 'subcontinental foods that she cooks' and 'the Hindi and Bengali movies that she rents' and, as a result, essentially inhibits 'the Bangladesh from which her husband has taken her'.[70] Arguably, Nazneen's life in London is also largely based on reterritorialisation of her Eastern habits in the West. The meals she cooks, the language she speaks and the religion she practices all come from her homeland. The neighbourhood of Tower Hamlets that she lives in and that is inhabited by many South-Asians is itself a place that has been reterritorialised because it allows 'immigrants to continue to participate in the social behaviours of their country of origin despite the move to England'.[71] Therefore, the concepts of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation by Deleuze and Guattari are clearly visible in *Brick Lane* not only in Chanu's behaviour but also in Nazneen's: her life in London is a perfect example of destabilisation of links between culture and territory because she cherishes Eastern habits in the Western metropolis. However, as this chapter will illustrate later, Nazneen slowly turns away from her past in Bangladesh and gives London permission to transform her identity, while Hind stays strongly attached to her

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[68] Søren Frank, *Salman Rushdie: A Deleuzian Reading* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2011) 143.

[69] Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (New York: Viking, 1989) 250.

[70] Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) 203.

[71] Alaa Alghamdi, *Transformations of the Liminal Self: Configurations of Home and Identity for Muslim Characters in British Postcolonial Fiction* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2011) 133.

homeland.

When Nazneen leaves her largely Bangladeshi borough of Tower Hamlets and discovers the business district on her solitary walk, it introduces her to new feelings and emotions about her identity. As the novel says:

> […] Nazneen, hobbling and halting, began to be aware of herself. Without a coat, without a suit, without a white face, without a destination. … But they [the strangers on the street] were not aware of her. In the next instant she knew it. They could not see her any more than she could see God. They knew that she existed (just as she knew that He existed) but unless she did something, waved a gun, halted the traffic, they would not see her. She enjoyed this thought.[72]

According to Esra Santesso, Nazneen 'comes to recognise herself as an individual, an independent body outside the diasporic community' for the first time during this particular passage of the novel; Nazneen might feel invisible in the eyes of the dominant culture but she becomes 'aware of herself through the acknowledgment of her own body' and its particular characteristics.[73] In order to discover her difference from the Londoners around her, Nazneen must gaze over the public space and distance herself from the crowd to scrutinise it, which makes her reminiscent of Benjamin's figure of the flâneur who, as explained in the introduction, is a spectator in the city and differentiates himself from the mass. Nevertheless, Nazneen's relationship to flânerie itself will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. What is important to assert at this point of the analysis is that the walk that Nazneen experiences on her own is very empowering for her: it gives her a strong feeling of self-awareness and ability as well as helps her to acknowledge her difference from other people in the crowd. Consequently, Nazneen defines herself in opposition to the white population. As Kim Duff claims, Nazneen's 'self-awareness is gleaned in comparison with how she sees herself in relation to the people, buildings, and landscapes she encounters'.[74] That is to say,

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[72] Ali, 40.

[73] Esra Santesso, *Disorientation: Muslim Identity in Contemporary Anglophone Literature* (London: Macmillan, 2013) 63.

[74] Kim Duff, *Contemporary British Literature and Urban Space: After Thatcher* (London: Macmillan, 2014) 112.

when the protagonist observes people and the urban space on Bishopgate, she sees that she has no 'coat', 'suit' or 'a white face' and that she is, in fact, the Other. During this walk, the reader also witnesses many images of London that are filtered through Nazneen's perspective and that confirm her position of the Other within British society. For example, the protagonist compares crossing the roads safely to 'walking out in the monsoon and hoping to dodge the raindrops', she finds buildings to be 'impassive as cows' and the colour of a white woman's coat reminds her of 'the colour of a bride's sari'.[75] As Sasha Matthewman correctly claims, Nazneen 'reads London's environment through the lens of her memories' and she describes 'the city through the metaphors of her home country' - 'she sees details of the city in vivid contrast to her own cultural understanding'.[76] Therefore, Nazneen explores London during her first walk and it is an important step in her self-development in the novel but we have to remember that she does not view the city as white Londoner. In fact, she connects what she encounters around herself to her roots, i.e. the village in East Pakistan where she grew up with her family.

The protagonist even communicates with a stranger on her first walk outside. It is an Indian man and talking to him is a key moment for Nazneen:

> […] He [the stranger] said something. Nazneen recognised Hindi when she heard it, but she did not understand it. He tried again, in Urdu. Nazneen could speak some Urdu, but the man's accent was so strong that she could not understand this either. She shook her head. He spoke in English this time … She shook her head again and said, 'Sorry.' And he nodded solemnly and took his leave.[77]

Arguably, the man that Nazneen meets on the street assumes that she can speak Hindi or Urdu based on her looks, i.e. skin colour and dress. However, Nazneen cannot understand him and she uses one of the few basic English words that she knows to reply to him instead. By reacting to the stranger's inquiry in the official language of her host country, Nazneen finally

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[75] Ali, 38.
Ali, 40.
[76] Sasha Matthewman, *Teaching Secondary English as If the Planet Matters* (New York: Routledge, 2011) 119.
[77] Ali, 43.

crosses the boundary between two cultures and, as Johansen argues, it is the moment when she realises that she is 'both foreign and at home in London'.[78] In other words, the passage quoted above marks the very beginning of the protagonist's transition towards hybrid identity. After a long time of cultural isolation, Nazneen seems to be very excited about talking to somebody in English - as the narrator says, 'in spite of the fact that she was lost and cold and stupid, she began to feel a little pleased. She had spoken in English, to a stranger, and she had been understood and acknowledged. It was very little. But it was something'.[79] Therefore, when Nazneen gains a sense of individuality and self-awareness, experiences the metropolis through the lens of the Other and communicates in English for the first time, her hybridity starts to form: as Duff claims, Nazneen's 'emerging Britishness is … born of a dialectical engagement between identity, language and space'.[80]

Once Nazneen knows that she can walk around the metropolis on her own, she starts to feel empowered not only as an immigrant but also as a woman. Experiencing the Western city gives Nazneen a feeling that '*anything is possible*':

> […] *Anything is possible*. She wanted to shout it. Do you [Chanu] know what I did today? I went inside a pub. To use the toilet. Did you think I could do that? I walked mile upon mile, probably around the whole of London, although I did not see the edge of it. And to get home again I went to a restaurant. I found a Bangladeshi restaurant and asked directions. See what I can do![81]

It is immediately after her first outing, when Chanu dismisses the idea that he could go to Dhaka to find her sister, that Nazneen finally loses her patience with him and his belittling of her ideas and skills and the novel shows us these new and brave thoughts that she has. After this moment, the book also informs us that Nazneen stops praying for her husband's promotion, puts fiery red chillies in his food, stops washing his socks, cuts him with his razor

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[78] Johansen, 54.

[79] Ali, 43.

[80] Duff, 111.

[81] Ali, 45.

and performs other 'small insurrections, designed to destroy the state from within'.[82] In other words, Nazneen begins to rebel against her husband and the control that he has in their household because the protagonist suddenly realises that her gender should not and does not fully limit her basic daily activities in London unless she lets her husband tell her otherwise. As Mohamed Noufal claims, when Nazneen finally experiences the streets of London, she finds 'the Western land' to be 'culturally more flexible than her own country' and that gives her 'freedom and scope to think about the possibilities beyond mere playing the roles of mother, wife and daughter' - i.e. the only identities that she had thought she could perform during her early days in Britain.[83] In consequence, Nazneen begins to long for more equality and authority in her marriage, which results in her pursuing work from home. Therefore, it is possible to argue that Ali's *Brick Lane* creates an image of the Western metropolis as a site of possibility for emancipation and self-exploration of females that originally come from countries with very strict gender roles and who initially have limited ideas of what sort of identities they could perform in their new location.

There are two men in Nazneen's life. The first one is her husband, Chanu, some of whose impact on Nazneen's dwelling in London and her identity formation has already been partially discussed. There is also Karim, a young man whom Nazneen meets through work because he brings her bundles of jeans to sew and who eventually becomes her lover. Since both of the men play important roles in the book, it is useful to explore these characters and their view of London as well as their influence on Nazneen's character development. As stated at the beginning of the chapter, Chanu is a first generation immigrant of the South-Asian diaspora in Britain. He often prides himself on being an educated man because he has a degree from the Dhaka University and, as a result, he originally expects everybody to value him and to be given great work opportunities in his host country. However, no matter what job he has, Chanu does not wish to settle in the British metropolis forever. As he says in the novel, 'when the English went to our country … They went to make money, and the money they made, they took it out of the country. They never left home. Mentally. … And that is

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[82] Ali, 45.

[83] Mohamed Noufal, 'Re-orientalising the Orient: A Critique of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*,' *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities* Sept. 2014: 448-455.

what I am doing now'.[84] Indeed the reasons behind Chanu's immigration are clear and often repeated throughout the course of the novel: he wants to raise a lot of money because then he can go back to Bangladesh as a respectable man with great status. Chanu wants to become very successful and rich in London but he does not want to settle there by which he essentially resists the metropolis that only reminds him of the fact that the English found it acceptable to take advantage out of his own home country in the past. In this sense, Chanu exemplifies the typical condition of many first generation immigrants because he sees London as a place of economic growth but he is fixated on the idea of returning to his homeland.

It is possible to call Chanu, unlike Nazneen, a hybrid character from the very beginning of the novel. Like all hybrid characters who typically 'construct their identities from a desire to preserve some link to the homeland' but do not 'necessarily *completely* [my emphasis] reject the hostland', Chanu is stuck in his position of in-between cultures.[85] Indeed, although he sees London as a symbol of England's past imperial power that he openly criticises in the novel and despite the fact that he has not mentally left Bangladesh, Chanu does exemplify some interest to belong in British society. Not only that he speaks both English and Bengali, which is one of the examples of the mixing of Western and Eastern features in his character, he is also deeply interested in the history and arts of both his original homeland and Britain and he often celebrates and compares various aspects of the two. It is mostly his knowledge of British writing and philosophy that he gained during his studies of English literature at the Dhaka University that initially gives him a sense of understanding of British culture and makes him believe that he can become an equal part of it while he lives in London. Consequently, once he moves to the metropolis, Chanu attempts to copy the dominant culture mostly by quoting British authors and thinkers that he has read or studied. In other words, Chanu begins to mimic Englishness in order to belong in London but he only becomes, in Bhabha's terms, 'a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite'.[86] It is impossible for Chanu to become an equal of the English no matter how much he tries because he can only create copies of the hegemonic culture. Indeed, Chanu is destined to

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[84] Ali, 174.

[85] Luis Sanchez, *Puerto Rico's 79th Municipality?: Identity, Hybridity and Transnationalism Within the Puerto Rican Diaspora in Orlando, Florida* (Ann Arbor: ProQuest, 2008) 23.

[86] Bhabha, 122.

always be a hybrid character and that is the reason why he 'desperately lurches between an outmoded aspirational Englishness embodied in a Leavisite account of literary culture' and 'a version of himself as an 'educated man' who has stooped to the condition of moneymaker in order to return to an unsullied home' throughout the whole novel.[87] Nevertheless, by switching his 'original' identity for mimicry in London, Chanu's character exemplifies the creative potential of hybrid identities and how they can be transformed and adapted according to spatial and cultural surroundings of individuals.

Chanu's life in London has no spatial limitations based on his gender. While Nazneen is not initially encouraged to learn English, go outside on her own and work, Chanu, as a man, is free to walk around the city as he pleases, pursues jobs and he had been given the opportunity to study English long before arriving in England. However, Chanu encounters a lot of different problems in the metropolis that Nazneen does not experience since she is mostly tied to her domestic space and the Bangladeshi community. What arises as one of the biggest difficulties for Chanu during the course of the novel is the way he is treated professionally because of his status of an immigrant:

> […] When I came I was a young man. I had ambitions. Big dreams. When I got off the aeroplane I had my degree certificate in my suitcase and a few pounds in my pocket. I thought there would be a red carpet laid out for me ... That was my plan. And then I found things were a bit different.[88]

The passage quoted above clearly shows that Chanu, who hoped to become a 'big man' and wanted to achieve great things, realises that his expectations of living in London had been extremely unrealistic and that people in Britain do not value his university education and skills.[89] In fact, Chanu is portrayed as a victim of racial inequality and that is especially in his job. However, the book only provides brief comments on Chanu's work situation to make sure that the reader knows that Chanu's failures to get promoted or get a well-paid and stable job

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[87] Umme Sadat Nazmun Nahar Al-wazedi, *Hearing 'Subaltern' Voices of Resistance in the Works of Mahasweta Devi, Taslima Nasrin and Monica Ali* (Ann Arbor: ProQuest, 2008) 165.

[88] Ali, 21.

[89] Ali, 53.

are not purely his own fault and it does not speak about his struggles in much detail. One of such moments in the novel that prove the role of racism in Chanu's professional development is Nazneen's conversation with Razia, when Nazneen tells her that Chanu 'says that if he painted his skin pink and white then there would be no problem' for him to be successful.[90] Therefore, throughout the course of the novel, Chanu slowly begins to come to terms with the fact that the metropolis does not have much to offer to him and the first generation immigrants in general despite their hard work because they will never be considered equal by the hegemonic culture. Consequently, Chanu becomes more deeply fixated on his original homeland and the idea of return. Nevertheless, as Rebecca Walkowitz argues, Chanu's home country is only imaginary because he constructs a completely 'mythic Bangladesh' in his mind in order to 'compensate for his failure to succeed in English culture' - he does not acknowledge the differences between the homeland of his fantasies and the reality of contemporary Bangladesh that are described in the novel in the letters of Nazneen's sister.[91]

How then does a hybrid character like Chanu move through the space of the city and observe its spaces in comparison to his wife whose hybrid identity is only gradually developing by her contact with the metropolis? Interestingly, Chanu's case is similar to that of Nazneen in the sense that he does not know that much about London. As argued above, Chanu is not limited by his gender and can move around the city freely, which results in him being slightly more knowledgeable about the area him and Nazneen live in - however, for most of his time in Britain, he does not seek to discover what the city has to offer beyond Brick Lane and remains confined to the space of London's East End. It is only when Chanu's career in England completely fails and he decides that him and his family are moving back to Bangladesh that he shows proper interest in exploring London and organises a sight-seeing trip - as Chanu himself claims in the novel after thirty years of living in the metropolis: 'I've spent more than half my life here … but I hardly left these few streets.'[92] Once everything is planned and the family leaves Tower Hamlets for the sightseeing in West London, Chanu admits even further that he does not know enough about the places of the city that has been

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[90] Ali, 104.

[91] Rebecca Walkowitz, *Immigrant Fictions: Contemporary Literature in an Age of Globalization* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010) 702.

[92] Ali, 238.

his home - he feels 'it would be good to take an opinion from a local' about London's sights although he lives only 'two blocks behind'.[93] It must be noted that this passage of *Brick Lane* and many others that talk about Chanu's life in the metropolis are incredibly reminiscent of Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* and the character of Haroon. Exactly like Chanu, Haroon is a first generation South-Asian immigrant and he spends years mimicking Englishness in his job as an employee of the British government but never fully succeeds to be accepted by the dominant culture in Britain because of his hybridity, race and cultural roots. Moreover, like Chanu, Haroon has problems navigating through London - as the narrator of *The Buddha of Suburbia* claims, Haroon 'had been in Britain since 1950 - over twenty years - and for fifteen of those years he'd lived in the South of London suburbs' and yet 'still he stumbled around the place like an Indian just off the boat'.[94] In other words, both Haroon and Chanu exemplify how lost in the environment of London the first generation immigrants are because, as Guignery argues, they are 'tied to certain areas' and usually 'shuttle backwards and forwards along a fixed itinerary' by which 'their experience of London' becomes nothing else but 'a journey between two points linked by a string of places, at which they never stop'.[95]

When Chanu, Nazneen and their daughters arrive in West London by bus, he feels that he has 'become a tourist' in the metropolis.[96] Indeed, Chanu even buys a special outfit for the occasion and fills his pockets with 'a compass, guidebook, binoculars, bottled water, maps, and two types of disposable camera' by which he visually resembles the stereotypical image of a tourist.[97] Therefore, as Eva Pataki aptly claims, at this point of the narrative 'ironically, [Chanu] applies the perfect mimicry of the tourist, whereas all along it is his Englishness that has been mimicry'.[98] Arguably, the tourist mimicry then serves as an opportunity for Chanu to momentarily forget about his failure to succeed in London. Indeed, as Paul Newland claims,

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[93] Ali, 239.

[94] Hanif Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1990) 21.

[95] Guignery, 85.

[96] Ali, 238.

[97] Ali, 238.

[98] Éva Pataki, ''Going somewhere': The Nomad and the Tourist in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* and Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal's *Tourism*,' *Partium Journal of English Studies*, 2012, 25 April 2015 < http://www.theroundtable.ro/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8&Itemid=5>.

by performing his role of a tourist around Buckingham Palace and St. James Park, Chanu 'chooses to escape from the 'real' conditions that his mobility has introduced him to as an immigrant in East London by touring the 'unreal' attractions of a tourist 'idea' of London'.[99] Therefore, Chanu's tourism is also his attempt to discover and enjoy the London of his pre-migration fantasy. Interestingly, according to Pataki's theory, there is a close connection between tourism and nomadism: both tourists and nomads 'favour transition', have 'trenchant sense of territory but no possessiveness about it' and 'can impersonate or mimic' but resist complete assimilation.[100] In this sense, Chanu is not only a tourist but also possesses some basic characteristics of a nomad. Yet the tourist trip to West London is significant for Nazneen too. In her case, it further broadens her horizons of the metropolis. As argued above, she discovers some of the variety of London on her first walk, however, it is on her journeys with Chanu, when she sees places that she cannot reach on foot, that she experiences even more versions of the metropolis, such as the London that tourists from all over the world come to see. Nazneen engages in the trip by preparing a picnic of typical Eastern meals to be eaten in St. James Park and by making sure everything runs smoothly. Eventually, on their tourist afternoon, Nazneen takes a photo of Chanu and their daughters in front of Buckingham Palace 'that would live in the kitchen, propped up against the tiles at the back of the work surface, accumulating a fine spray of turmeric-strained grease from her cooking pot'.[101] It can be argued that this photograph is reminiscent of Ball's theory of resisting the city by projecting it into small objects that make the immigrant feel like they too can possess the urban space like members of the hegemonic culture. Indeed, as Alastair Pennycook and Emi Otsuji argue, taking the photograph is Nazneen's attempt to claim her right to London, to make the metropolis her own, 'even if its end result is not so much a sense of city ownership but a memory of a trip captured in a fading photograph next to the stove where she is designed to spend much of her time'.[102]

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[99] Paul Newland, *The Cultural Construction of London's East End: Urban Iconography, Modernity and the Spatialisation of Englishness* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008) 246.

[100] Pataki, 4.

[101] Ali, 243.

[102] Alastair Pennycook and Emi Otsuji, *Metrolingualism: Language in the City* (New York, Routledge, 2015) 107.

According to Nora Pleßke, it is generally such trips with her husband that allow Nazneen to 'engage in different ways with the metropolitan contact zone' - from behind the bus windows, Nazneen can perceive London as a 'crawling carnival', i.e. as a place of incredible diversity where people of all kinds of backgrounds mingle and try to navigate and understand the urban space but also as a metropolis that offers 'a little bit of everything from the world' on every corner.[103] In this sense, Chanu is instrumental in his wife's process of embracing London as her new home as well as her newly found hybridity. Yet by the time her husband organises the tourist day in West London, Nazneen's identity had already been largely influenced by her lover, Karim, who enters the story as Chanu's complete opposite: he is young, attractive, financially secure, 'religious rather than multi faithed' and for a long time Nazneen feels more comfortable with him than with her husband.[104] Being a second generation immigrant, Karim is a great example of how different the experience of the metropolis can be for people with South-Asian heritage born in London. Karim struggles to belong in the metropolis like many other second generation immigrants who are not considered 'British' by the dominant culture and who are faced daily with prejudice and racism because of their roots and skin colour. Second generation immigrants usually deal with their inability to integrate into British society in the following way: they feel British and endlessly fight for their place in the multicultural Western city despite the racial tensions that it brings but a lot of them also try to define their identities in relation to the homeland of their parents. This is what applies to Karim, who becomes fixated on Bangladesh and Islam despite being born in London.

It would be certainly wrong to assume that Karim rejects his Britishness because of his passionate interest in Bangladesh. As Abby A. McMonagle claims, 'Karim lives in Britain and even identifies himself as British', however, he 'seeks to prove that he can also be a Muslim man with Bangladeshi ancestry' who owns a space in London.[105] Karim is depicted as

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[103] Nora Pleßke, *The Intelligible Metropolis: Urban Mentality in Contemporary London Novels* (Munich: Verlag, 2014) 239.

Ali, 77.

[104] Sunita Sinha, *Post-colonial Women Writers: New Perspectives* (New Delhi: Atlantic, 2008) 238.

[105] Abby A. McMonagle, 'Performative National Cultures: Hybridity, Blurred Boundaries, and Agency in Untouchable and Brick Lane,' *Digital Commons Brockport*, 2010, 3 May 2015 < http:// digitalcommons.brockport.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1055&context=eng_theses>.

somebody who speaks perfect English but also knows Bengali, he wears jeans and white shirt like a Westerner but he has a salaat alert on his mobile phone and he is very passionate about Islam. In other words, Karim is certainly a hybrid character because his life and identity in London combine both Eastern and Western aspects. Nevertheless, it must be noted that Karim's idea of Eastern habits and what life in Bangladesh really looks like do not come from his personal experience because he has never even visited the country. As the novel shows, Karim learns a lot about Bangladesh from the Bangladeshi community in London in which he lives or from online sources, for example when he uses Chanu's computer to search for a 'day in the life of a typical Bangladeshi village'.[106] In other words, everything Karim knows about Bangladesh is only imaginary and based on information from other people. Moreover, Karim's interest in the East reflects in his organisation of a radical movement called the Bengal Tigers, a group that stands up to white racists that attack people in the area of Brick Lane and which arguably makes him feel like he belongs to some sort of a unified community based on Eastern values. Eventually, once the group's fundamentalism increases after 9/11 which is at the background of the second half of the novel, Karim also begins to change: he starts to be even more focused on Islam and the well-being of the Bangladeshi community in London, he appears in a Bengali attire and he eventually turns out to be as conventional as Chanu in defining his relationship with Nazneen despite remaining hybridised. It must be noted here that the novel does not provide particular scenes that would depict Karim moving through the urban space but it can be assumed that he knows the streets of London quite well and moves around the city freely because he has always lived there and nowhere else. Nevertheless, as foreshadowed above, Karim is unhappy during his life in London due to racism and because he constantly feels like there is no space for people like him in the metropolis. Karim eventually disappears and the reader learns that he possibly left to Bangladesh in a false hope to find a sense of belonging in the country of his ancestors.

How then is the young Karim influential? At first, the cultural hybridity that Karim personifies is very attractive to the protagonist: Nazneen is surprised by his perfect English as well as by his stammering in Bengali despite his socialising among a Bangladeshi community, she seems fascinated by his Western clothing when they meet and the fact that he considers

[106] Ali, 287.

London his home and navigates it well but will not stop talking about Bangladesh. Arguably, Karim personifies a new cultural form that Nazneen has never seen before and she finds him inspiring - he makes her aware of cultural hybridity and that it is something that she can achieve in London too. Indeed, as Alaa Alghamdi claims, Karim is 'the closest thing to a 'born and bred' Englishman that she [Nazneen] has been in close contact with' and his hybridity 'engages and liberates her' in London.[107] It is thanks to the hybrid Karim that she leaves the flat a lot more, especially when she goes to the Bengal Tigers meetings, and she improves her English language. In Nazneen's eyes, Karim's split identity brings England and Bangladesh together, it mixes 'the familiar and the exotic' and having an affair with him allows her 'to be a participant in both'.[108] However, not only that he makes her feel free to move around London, she enjoys spending time around him inside her home as well and, as a result, she stops perceiving the domestic sphere only negatively. Indeed, as Pleßke claims, spending time with the second generation man results in Nazneen re-adjusting 'the interior private space of the flat' and 'making a home for herself and her daughters', while it also 'widens her mental map of the external London environment': although she goes out with her husband, it is mainly due to Karim's presence in her life that we see Nazneen advance from 'a mere distanced spectator at the window to an actor involved in writing the city by walking and reterritorialising the streets of the metropolis'.[109] In contrast, Karim perceives Nazneen as a scrap of Bangladesh: to him, she is the typical 'Bengali wife', 'a Bengali mother', 'the real thing' that brings him closer to the understanding of his hybridity and the homeland of his parents and ancestors that he feels a connection to. Indeed, Nazneen turns out to be nothing but 'his idea of home' and 'an idea of himself that he found in her'.[110] This image of Nazneen that Karim has is also the reason why he eventually wants her to leave Chanu and marry him instead. Yet by the time Karim asks Nazneen to marry him, she already knows that she is not and cannot become the woman he wants her to be: she is not the girl from a Bangladeshi village or his 'real thing' anymore but rather a hybrid and an empowered woman. Moreover, Nazneen recognises that marrying Karim would end up in her having to perform the role of a

[107] Alghamdi, 171.

[108] Alghamdi, 171.

[109] Pleßke, 211.

[110] Ali, 382.

Muslim wife and a mother like she has done in her marriage with Chanu and that is the identity that she wants to escape forever rather than recreate with another man.[111] When Nazneen turns down Karim's offer of marriage and at the same time decides not to leave for Bangladesh with Chanu who has packed his bags and made definite plans to return to his homeland, she becomes 'startled by her own agency'.[112] Indeed, this is the moment in the novel when the protagonist finally rejects relying on fate and says: '*I will decide what to do. I will say what happens to me. I will be the one.*'[113] In other words, while both Chanu and Karim eventually leave for Bangladesh in hope to find happiness in their imaginary homeland after their struggles to feel fully at home in London, Nazneen takes matters into her own hands for the first time in her life and makes the future for herself as she embarks on a new journey in the English metropolis as an independent woman with two daughters. At this point, Nazneen has found her hybridity and come to recognise London as her home, which is also why she pursues her sewing job by which she gains financial security and the possibility to survive in the city on her own. In this sense, we can argue that *Brick Lane* is, in fact, a Bildungsroman.

It is towards the end of the novel when Nazneen leaves home to tell Karim that she will not marry him when she herself realises how she has developed, how much more confident she now feels when she walks through the urban space of London: 'How much could it say? One step in front of the other. Could it say, I am this and I am not this? Could a walk tell lies? Could it change you?'[114] A lot has already been said about Nazneen's embracement of the public sphere and the ways in which her movement around the metropolis influences her identity in London throughout the whole novel. The question that remains to be answered is whether Nazneen could be defined as a flâneuse, which is something this chapter already briefly touched upon on in its beginning. Paul Newland argues that Nazneen is not a flâneuse because 'the viewpoint of the *flâneur* cannot be open to a woman in the city', especially since she is not 'a white middle-class woman of leisure' but an 'Othered' Asian

[111] Hywel Dix, *Postmodern Fiction and the Break-Up of Britain* (London: Continuum, 2010) 138.
[112] Ali, 5.
[113] Ali, 339.
[114] Ali, 334.

woman.[115] However, this work disagrees with such interpretation of Nazneen's experience of the metropolis. Arguably, Nazneen does not follow Benjamin's original concept of flânerie that is presented in the introduction of this work as a sort of solitary walking around the city in order to experience its objects of art and sights. Nevertheless, as Pleßke argues, already Nazneen's first impressions of London on her walk are 'from the invisible stance of a flâneuse gaze' as she watches 'the alien Londoners around her' and it is this invisibility that is at the heart of flânerie that helps her define her individual characteristics and her difference from the hegemonic culture when she becomes a spectator on her solitary walk.[116] Nazneen is not a simple observer of the urban space but a flâneuse because she loses herself in the metropolis; she is an example of the contemporary diasporic flâneuse whose walks help her to make a sense of her identity and belonging.[117] In addition, for most of the novel, Nazneen is in the role of the estranged flâneuse typical for postcolonial writing because she filters her urban experiences through the lens of her growing hybridity. As argued in the introduction, once flânerie becomes ungendered, the figure of the flâneur/flâneuse turns into a person in between oppositions and that is perfectly visible in the character of Nazneen as well: with her rising flânerie, she begins to occupy the space between private and public instead of staying limited by her domestic sphere.

Finally, we have to pay attention to Nazneen's two daughters and their relationship to the metropolis. Both Shahana and Bibi are considered second generation immigrants because they were born in London. Although the girls have never visited Bangladesh, they are constantly forced to think about it as about a place where they could belong, especially by their father. Both Shahana and Bibi understand that Bangladesh is significant for their family and that it is the birthplace of their parents and ancestors but, unlike the second generation Karim, the girls find it impossible to see their personal link to Bangladesh. That is to say, they feel that they are British and that London is their only true home and they do not exemplify any desire to learn about or even experience the place their family comes from. However, Shahana and Bibi cannot deny that their identities are partially defined in relation to their

[115] Newland, 244.

[116] Pleßke, 212.

[117] Duff, 111.

parents' homeland: they both are hybrids because they have been growing up caught between the culture of their parents and that of London. The hybridity of Nazneen's daughters is exemplified by their ability to switch between English and Bengali but also by the fact that they live in a household where they are exposed to Eastern habits and meals, while outside of their home they observe and want to participate in the way of life of the dominant culture which they have a preference for. As a result, with Chanu's rising interest to return to his homeland with his family throughout the novel, both Shahana and Bibi begin to fear that they will have to leave England with their parents and live in what is a completely foreign country to them. The girls spend a lot of time teasing each other about their possible future in Bangladesh and they see moving to their parents' homeland as the worst possible thing that could happen.

Despite sharing the same hybrid identity, Shahana and Bibi are very different characters. The younger of the daughters, Bibi, often listens to her father's advice and orders while identifying herself as English by which she 'adheres to the image he wishes to see of her as a young woman'.[118] In this sense, as Yasmin Hussain argues, the hybrid Bibi is 'effective as a cultural navigator' because 'she decides how to behave within the given contexts and manoeuvres between the different communities' - 'she is able to switch codes as appropriate'.[119] While Bibi's survival strategy in the metropolis is to act according to what the dominant culture or the Bangladeshi people expect of her, Shahana creates a lot of tension in her family because, unlike her sister, she is not willing to control her behaviour:

> […] Shahana did not want to listen to Bengali classical music. Her written Bengali was shocking. She wanted to wear jeans. She hated her kameez and spoiled her entire wardrobe by pouring paint on them. If she could choose between baked beans and dal it was no contest. When Bangladesh was mentioned she pulled a face. She did not know and would not learn that Tagore was more than poet and Nobel laureate, and no less than the true father of her nation. Shahana did not care. Shahana

[118] Yasmin Hussain, *Writing Diaspora: South-Asian Women, Culture, and Ethnicity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2005) 108.
[119] Hussain, 108.

did not want to go back home.[120]

By doing all of the above, Shahana bravely stands up to her parents' ideas of what her appearance and behaviour should be like and creates a generational conflict in the novel. In fact, Shahana does everything purely 'as proof that she could not be 'taken home''.[121] The first generation perceives Shahana's lifestyle as undesirable, especially Chanu who says about his older daughter that 'she is only a child, and already the rot is beginning'.[122] According to Alghamdi, 'the immigrant who assimilates to English culture and loses the Bengali identity succumbs to 'rot' … because the components of the original identity gradually begin to fall apart, devolve, and finally disappear'.[123] This is the process that first generation immigrants like Chanu fear, which is why they always stay to some extent, 'tied to a sense of identity that references a distant 'home' and identity'- as a result, it is difficult for them to understand that their children born in London can give up their heritage so freely.[124] In contrast to Chanu, Nazneen is more accepting of her daughters' cultural preferences throughout the novel. It is partially because of the fact that Shahana and Bibi teach Nazneen about aspects of British culture which she herself gradually embraces. For example, although she picks up a lot of English from Karim, Shahana and Bibi are arguably the primary influence on their mother's English skills because they spend a lot of time together and Nazneen allows her daughters to switch to English at home when Chanu is not around. Moreover, Nazneen also develops a sense of understanding of her older daughter's preference to wear Western clothes and learns that clothes seem to often reflect one's own identity. In fact, Nazneen herself becomes 'gripped by an idea that if she changed her clothes her entire life would change as well' and that not wearing her saris could possibly bring her closer to becoming a Westerner.[125] Therefore, Nazneen is willing to accept the generational differences in her family and she

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[120] Ali, 144.

[121] Ali, 240.

[122] Ali, 146.

[123] Alghamdi, 154.

[124] Alghamdi, 154.

[125] Ali, 228.
Santesso, 107.

might sympathise with her daughter Shahana to some extent, while Chanu only judges her interests and way of life.

Shahana often openly argues with her parents about the family's planned return to Bangladesh. Except the dread of living in a foreign country and culture that was discussed above, Shahana rejects Bangladesh because of the fear of arranged marriage and low standards of living; the girl thinks she and her sister will be 'married off in no time' and that their husbands will keep them 'locked up in a little smelly room'.[126] Indeed, marriage at a young age is what the two sisters often talk about and, as Pei-Chen Liao claims, 'apprehension about forced marriage' often 'becomes part of young girls' daily life in the diasporic community' in the city in general.[127] While Shahana and Bibi are scared of hypothetical weddings because they are familiar with transcontinental marriage 'for their mother is herself a bride brought over to Britain from Bangladesh', there are many female characters who have to deal with the consequences of having their partners chosen for them by their parents in other novels.[128] A good example of such a character is the second generation immigrant Jamila in *The Buddha of Suburbia* whose father goes on a hunger strike to blackmail her into marrying a man whom he picks for her and has him brought to London from India. Although Jamila gives in and marries Changez, she does not let her father manipulate her further and she leaves home by which she breaks away from all kinds of orders and expectations of her family. Indeed, distancing oneself from one's own family in the metropolis is a common way of dealing with generational conflicts for many young immigrants and Shahana is not an exception. In addition to her small rebellions, Shahana tries to persuade her parents to go to Bangladesh without her and to leave her behind in London because she is desperate to stay where she feels she belongs. Eventually, when her father still insists on leaving the metropolis with the whole family, Shahana decides to run away from home to Paignton with her friend because 'there were no Bangladeshis and they could do as they pleased'.[129] In other words, Shahana likes the metropolis but she is willing to leave it to

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[126] Ali, 330.

[127] Pei-Chen Liao, *'Post'-9/11 South-Asian Diasporic Fiction: Uncanny Terror* (New York: Macmillan, 2013) 330.

[128] Liao, 330.

[129] Ali, 392.

escape the Bangladeshi community and to live somewhere else where she hopes she will not be pressured to act according to Eastern cultural norms anymore. Although she does not succeed to leave and is tracked down by her mother, the young girl's escape from home is a key moment in Ali's book because it is the final impulse for Nazneen to stay in London for good. As Afrin Zeenat argues, Nazneen knows by this point in the novel that 'London offers more possibilities to her in terms of establishing a separate identity as a woman which would get trampled if she returned home' and she is aware that she has to protect her Westernised daughters from the same danger.[130] Therefore, Nazneen does not only save herself but also her daughters by deciding to stay in the English capital.

[130] Afrin Zeenat, 'Cultural Identity in Flux in Brick Lane,' *Spectrum 4*, June 2006, 22 May 2015 <http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/16730/6/06_chapter%202.pdf>.

3. *White Teeth*

Like *Brick Lane*, Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* is mostly set in London but it does include short passages that are either set in other locations or refer to foreign lands, such as Jamaica, Bangladesh and even continental Europe during the Second World War. Smith's novel is not only large in scope geographically but it refers to many different time periods as well. In fact, the plot of the book spans the period from the 19th century to the 21st century. Smith mixes linear and non-linear narration, which provides the reader with useful information about the past, present and future of the novel's main characters and helps them to make sense of their identity formations. Moreover, in comparison to *Brick Lane*, *White Teeth* deals with a larger number of characters and gives more space to the experience of second generation immigrants in the Western metropolis. Since all of the main characters are either related or closely tied to each other by friendships and romantic relationships, the discussion on the following pages must inevitably pay attention to how some of the characters relate to each other as well as to the ways in which they influence each other's lives and personal development in the English capital.

Some of the first immigrant characters that we are introduced to in *White Teeth* are the married couple Samad Iqbal and Alsana Begum. Both Samad and Alsana must be defined as first generation immigrants of the South-Asian diaspora in Britain because we learn that they came to England from Bangladesh in 1973. During the Second World War, Samad makes friends with an Englishman, Archie Jones, and the conversations they have introduce Samad to some of the common misconceptions, generalisations, ignorance and prejudice that the English may have towards the East and its culture. However, Samad still decides to move to Britain many years later with high hopes of starting a new life in London, unaware of the scope of difficulties and grave situations that living in the West may really bring. Throughout the course of the novel, the reader learns that Samad's immigration was originally economically motivated: as he says in the novel, 'you hand over your passport at the check-in, you get stamped, you want to make a little money, get yourself started'.[131] In other words, prior to his immigration, Samad envisions London as a place of possible economic growth

[131] Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (London: Penguin Books, 2001) 407.

and financial stability. Nevertheless, Samad also originally plans to go back to his homeland once he makes enough money by which he adheres to the myth of return like the majority of first generation immigrants. As argued in the introduction, many immigrants resist the city by openly criticising it while they cling to the memories of their homelands and this is exactly the case of Samad. Although he moves to London and wants to financially prosper from it, he does not like the city because it reminds him of Britain's past imperial power that took advantage of his homeland and he thinks that it is a 'wet', 'cold' and 'miserable' place where people have no morals.[132] Bangladesh then represents the opposite in Samad's mind throughout his life in the West because he believes that the East is a superior place where everybody lives with respect to tradition and faith. What Samad fails to realise is that the Bangladesh he remembers is a mythic place in his diasporic imagination; as Sylvia Hadjetian correctly claims, the Bangladesh that Samad talks about 'does not exist any more or has never existed but only in his mind'.[133] It must be noted here that Alsana creates a visible contrast to Samad in the novel. First, Alsana only accompanies her husband to London. The couple's marriage was arranged in Bangladesh and Samad takes her to London because she is his wife. In this sense, Alsana's move is not economically motivated because she personally has no plans of her own for her time in the metropolis. In fact, like Nazneen in *Brick Lane*, Alsana at first simply performs the role of the obedient Muslim wife who follows her husband to the West where he wants to prosper. Second, Alsana keeps up with the news from her homeland and develops a much clearer image of Bangladesh than her husband over the years that they spend in London. Consequently, Alsana does not resist London as much as her husband and she is willing to acknowledge that living in the West is more comfortable. Alsana is therefore not portrayed as somebody who is obsessed with the myth of return. On the contrary, she is 'thankful' for living in England and would allow her family to move back to the East only 'over her dead body'.[134]

The characters of Samad and Alsana fulfil the theory of hybridity because they are described to the reader as figures whose identities are products of the intermingling of Eastern

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[132] Smith, 407.

[133] Sylvia Hadjetian, *Multiculturalism and Magic Realism in Zadie Smith's Novel White Teeth: Between Fiction and Reality* (Hamburg: Anchor Academic Publishing, 2014) 63.

[134] Smith, 199.

and Western habits and different cultural attributes. There are certainly several aspects that allow us to define Samad as a hybrid character. He comes from Bangladesh but he speaks very good English, he identifies as a Muslim but he freely embraces Western clothes and wears 'his blue terry cloth jogging suit topped off with … LA Raiders baseball cap' and he is described as a man who likes to believe that he is devoted to Allah and his Eastern religion but he adopts habits typical for the Western world that absolutely contravene Islam; as he says in the novel, he wants to cheat on his wife with another woman, he swears, eats bacon, masturbates, drinks alcohol and his 'best friend is a kaffir non-believer.'[135] It is due to his hybridity that Samad begins to feel like he has been 'corrupted by England' while he only really straddles two cultures at the same time like many other immigrants and he finds it difficult to make a sense out of his hybrid identity.[136] To Samad, coming to live in London equals making 'a devil's pact' because 'it drags you in and suddenly you are unsuitable to return … you belong nowhere … then you begin to give up on the very idea of belonging'.[137] Therefore, since he reterritorialised some of his habits and religion from the East in his new location but began to mix it with some aspects of the typical Western lifestyle, Samad believes that he does not belong anywhere. We can also trace signs of Alsana's hybridity in *White Teeth*. Alsana is a Bengali woman but she speaks English in London. She keeps wearing traditional saris during her life in the city but she combines them with Western articles of clothing, such as running shoes. In addition, as foreshadowed above, the East and its culture is very dear to her heart but Alsana becomes Westernised to the point that she prefers to live in the West to her homeland. Therefore, Alsana is also caught in the position of in-between cultures. As Mark Stein aptly claims, *White Teeth* definitely 'celebrates a metropolis … where different heritages can be juggled within … the same person'.[138]

It is now necessary to focus on how Samad and Alsana move through the urban space of London, how they inhabit it and what it means to them. As discussed in the introduction,

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[135] Smith, 166.
Smith, 149.
[136] Smith, 144.
[137] Smith, 407.
[138] Stein, 12.

immigrants articulate and construct the metropolis according to their own cultural backgrounds but also their gender. Arguably, Samad's dwelling in London is in some ways reminiscent of Chanu's in *Brick Lane* - exactly like Chanu's, Samad's life in London has no spatial limitations based on his gender. He is a Muslim man who can move freely between the private and the public sphere without being strictly confined to one or the other because he is personally not expected to follow any limiting gender roles - these are usually imposed on Muslim women in the Western metropolis as we saw in the previous chapter in case of Nazneen. In this way, his gender allows Samad to go outside and attempt to pursue jobs around the city as well as socialise with all kinds of people on the streets, in bars, restaurants and in his children's school. On the other hand, both Chanu and Samad are portrayed as disadvantaged in the public sphere because of their cultural descent and immigrant status, especially on the job market in London. In contrast to Samad, Alsana's character appears to be more confined to the private sphere. Indeed, Alsana mostly moves around the area of London where she lives with her husband and she is preoccupied with domesticity; she takes care of the children, she sews at home to make money rather than finding work elsewhere and she only really socialises with her niece and her neighbour, Clara Bowden. Although Alsana is not discouraged by her husband to go outside, she is certainly expected to perform the role of a wife and a mother who takes care of the family. However, Samad soon finds that his wife is 'not as meek as he had assumed when they married': in other words, it seems that Samad would prefer Alsana to reterritorialise the identity of the obedient Muslim woman in London but she gains a lot of confidence during the couple's life in the metropolis; she begins to stand up to Samad and even has a physical fight with him because she learns that husbands in the West should communicate with their wives rather than give them orders and impose their expectations on them.[139]

As indicated earlier, Samad expects to be accepted in Britain and thinks that he can make a good living in the English capital but the reality of trying to work in the West turns out to be very hard for him. Coming back to the topic of inequality on the job market in London, Samad is forced to get in touch with his cousin, Ardashir, who is happy to hear that 'his older, cleverer, handsomer' relative is 'finding it hard to get work in England' and who

[139] Smith, 60.

eventually employs Samad as a waiter in his Indian restaurant situated in the area of Leicester Square.[140] As the novel shows, Samad ends up very frustrated in the only job available to him in his new location. When he deals with customers, he wishes he could be wearing a large sign with the following text:

> […] I AM NOT A WAITER. I HAVE BEEN A STUDENT, A SCIENTIST, A SOLDIER, MY WIFE IS CALLED ALSANA, WE LIVE IN EAST LONDON BUT WE WOULD LIKE TO MOVE NORTH. I AM A MUSLIM BUT ALLAH HAS FORSAKEN ME OR I HAVE FORSAKEN ALLAH, I'M NOT SURE. I HAVE A FRIEND - ARCHIE - AND OTHERS. I AM FORTY-NINE BUT WOMEN STILL TURN IN THE STREET. SOMETIMES.[141]

Indeed, Samad is not a waiter but a university educated man who feels that he should be able to have a job worthy of his qualifications. Instead, he must work long hours in a restaurant, lives off tips and hardly ever sees Alsana with whom he lives in East London because, despite his education, the hegemonic culture in Britain will simply not offer him better work due to his race and cultural descent. However, Samad's job as a waiter is not important only because of the fact that it reflects the inability of the first generation immigrants to achieve adequate careers in their host country, which is a very common phenomenon in postcolonial literature. As Guignery argues, the job that Samad has in central London is significant also because it is connected to 'the play with the postcolonial dichotomy and its projection onto London's topography'.[142] As stated in the introduction, London used to be the centre of the British Empire that controlled colonies, including Samad's homeland - Bangladesh, which were all perceived as peripheries of this powerful centre. Once Samad settles in the centre of the former Empire, we find that the dichotomy still holds and it is present in London itself: the immigrant works in a restaurant called 'The Palace' in the rich heart of the English capital reminiscent of colonial history and power but he 'remains a marginalised figure in the periphery of a postcolonial metropolis' as he dwells outside central London where he is also

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[140] Smith, 55.

[141] Smith, 58.

[142] Guignery, 175.

very likely to stay for the rest of his life.[143]

As mentioned above, when Samad and Alsana move to England in the 1970s, they settle in East London, namely in the Whitechapel district. Nevertheless, they are not happy there and they are desperate to move away to a different part of the metropolis. Eventually, Samad becomes so discontent with his surroundings that he asks Ardashir for a raise at work to fund his relocation. At this point, the novel informs us that Samad needs to leave East London due to very specific reasons: Alsana is pregnant and Whitechapel is a place 'where one couldn't bring up children, indeed, one couldn't, not if one didn't wish them to come to bodily harm'.[144] Indeed, London's East End is historically connected with very aggressive racism and this is what Smith's novel touches upon. As Benjamin Bowling claims, 'East London is cited as the geographical origin of the skinheads in 1969' and, as a result, it is the place where many members of the British culture were involved in 'Paki-bashing', i.e. 'systematic attacks on ethnic minority individuals and communities'.[145] This is why Samad and Alsana desire to go to North London or 'north-west, where things were more … more … liberal' and eventually settle in Willesden.[146] Naturally, the idea of any London neighbourhood being 'more liberal' at the time was only an illusion because racism, prejudice and inequality were present for immigrants in different forms everywhere, which also allows the narrator of *White Teeth* to claim that what differentiates Willesden from Whitechapel is that there is 'just not enough of any one thing to gang up against any other thing and send it running to the cellars'.[147] Yet, there are visual and social differences between the two areas that the novel describes, for example, when Alsana leaves her and Samad's new house in Willesden and goes for a walk to see her niece, Neena:

> […] It was a nice area; she couldn't deny it as she stormed towards the high

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[143] Guignery, 175.

[144] Smith, 59.

[145] Benjamn Bowling, *Violent Racism: Victimization, Policing and Social Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 178.

[146] Smith, 59.

[147] Smith, 63.

> road, avoiding trees where previously, in Whitechapel, she avoided flung-out mattresses and the homeless. … Alsana had a deep-seated belief that living near green spaces was morally beneficial to the young, and there to her right was Gladstone Park, a sweeping horizon of green … Willesden was not as pretty as Queens Park, but it was a nice area. No denying it.[148]

All of this naturally ties in with McLeod's theory that was discussed in the introduction: different London neighbourhoods offer varying perspectives on the city. First, there is Whitechapel with its dirty streets, racism and homelessness where the immigrants feel afraid for their own lives. Second, there is Willesden with its greenery, relatively safe streets and a better standard of living, which the immigrants have to work really hard to afford moving to. Finally, in complete contrast to Whitechapel and Willesden, there are areas populated mostly by the rich hegemonic culture, such as the City of Westminster where Samad works but that he will never inhabit because he is a marginalised figure. Therefore, we have to arrive at the conclusion that there are many Londons and Londoners in *White Teeth*. This is of course similar to what we saw in the previous chapter about *Brick Lane* when Nazneen went for a walk from Tower Hamlets to the business district of London and discovered the inequalities of the Western metropolis. Yet the image of London as a multitude is echoed in many other books as well, such as Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*. Indeed, Selvon's work also portrays the city as divided up 'in little worlds' where 'you stay in the world you belong to'; as a place where rich people in Belgravia, Knightsbridge, Hampstead 'and them other plush places' know nothing about what it is like to live 'in a grim place like Harrow Road or Notting Hill'.[149] Therefore, *Brick Lane*, *White Teeth* and *The Lonely Londoners* all describe London as 'a place of socio-ethnic polarities, where the destitute migrants and the rich live in different parts of the city, but where they can briefly cross paths'.[150]

It was discussed in the introduction that there are two basic spatial views of London. The metropolis may be viewed as a site representing England's former imperial hegemony as

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[148] Smith, 62.

[149] Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2014) 74.

[150] Françoise Král, *Social Invisibility and Diasporas in Anglophone Literature and Culture: The Fractal Gaze* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 186.

well as a postimperial contact zone and the life and actions of Samad in *White Teeth* show how the local and the global are always intertwined for the immigrant figure. On one hand, Samad dwells in London where he comes into contact with people of all sorts of backgrounds and races - especially members of the hegemonic culture and immigrants from Jamaica. On the other hand, Samad is constantly aware of the global associations that London has and how it reflects Britain's power and colonial rule. Naturally, all of this was already implied on the previous pages in the discussion of Samad's resistance to the city, his hybridity and especially the contrast between his living conditions and his workplace. Nevertheless, it is the ending of *White Teeth* where the narrator stresses the most clearly how much living in London really reminds Samad of colonial history. The reader is informed that soon after his arrival in England, Samad carved his surname in a bench at Trafalgar Square but a great shame washed over him when he did it because the deed made him feel like a coloniser: '*I wanted to write my name on the world*. It meant *I presumed*. Like the Englishmen who named the streets in Kerala after their wives, like the Americans who shoved their flag in the moon.'[151] Carving his name in central London can then be explained as Samad's attempt to claim a space in London, his way of writing back as an ex-colonial subject who feels alienated in the metropolis where he struggles to belong. That is to say, it is Samad's way of 'asserting his marginalised identity in the topographical centre of the former Empire's centre'.[152] Yet as Guignery claims, this moment does not only imply 'the postcolonial dichotomy between the metropolis and its former colony, Bangladesh' but it is yet another passage of the novel that represents the dichotomy within London's topography itself: 'Trafalgar Square with its reminders of colonial history is opposed to the periphery, the East End, Samad's home at that time'.[153]

There are also several significant second generation immigrants in *White Teeth*. It is important to look at some of these younger characters too and contrast their experiences of the metropolis with those of their parents. The second generation character who gets the most page space in the novel is definitely Millat, one of the sons of Samad and Alsana. Being a

[151] Smith, 505.

[152] Guignery, 174.

[153] Guignery, 174.

second generation immigrant of the South-Asian diaspora in Britain means that Millat was born in London and it is the only home he has ever had. On the other hand, he is constantly reminded by his parents about his Eastern cultural heritage, which complicates his life in the metropolis. Like Nazneen's daughters in *Brick Lane*, Millat is very well aware of his ancestors but when he is expected by his parents to appreciate Bangladesh, he simply cannot do that because he has never even visited the country. As a result of having to acknowledge his cultural roots while also feeling at home in the British metropolis, Millat begins to be unsure of who he really is as a person. Moreover, Millat's confusion about his own identity is often strengthened by some members of the hegemonic culture with whom he socialises since his childhood and teenage years. In fact, we see that most of the white people that Millat comes in close contact with in London project some stereotypical visions that the white Britons have about South-Asian immigrants on him. A great example is his school teacher, Poppy Burt-Jones, who wants to experiment with Indian music in class and asks Millat about what he listens to '*at home*'.[154] Poppy is then puzzled by the fact that Millat can only think of Bruce Springsteen and Michael Jackson as examples because she perceives him as exotic and mistakes him for an Indian purely based on his physical appearance and his South-Asian heritage. Similar presuppositions of the white British about Millat's origins are then echoed later in the novel when Millat meets the family of one his classmates, the Chalfens, for the first time:

> […] 'Well, … you look very exotic. Where are you from, if you don't mind me asking?'
> 'Willesden,' said Irie and Millat simultaneously.
> 'Yes, yes, of course, but where originally?'
> 'Oh,' said Millat, putting on what he called a bud-bud-ding-ding accent. 'You are meaning where from am I originally.'
> Joyce looked confused. 'Yes, originally.'
> 'Whitechapel,' said Millat, pulling out a fag. 'Via the Royal London Hospital and the 207 bus.'[155]

[154] Smith, 156.

[155] Smith, 319.

Instances like this surely make Millat feel further alienated in the West because he lives with a constant reminder that he does not appear as British as he feels on the inside. Yet this passage can also be read on another, more general level. It was argued in the introduction that postcolonial writing challenges the existence of authentic identities and this is what Smith shows here in the portrayal of Millat because, as Eva Knopp argues, the Chalfens inquiring about Millat's 'original home' points at 'the absurdity of notions of an authentic cultural or ethnic origin and identity' in a metropolis that has 'always experienced migration'.[156]

Since the stereotypical images of South-Asians pervade Millat's life in London, the novel says that Millat knows that 'he, Millat, was a Paki no matter where he came from; that he smelt of curry … took other people's jobs … that he should go back to his own country … that he worshipped elephants and wore turbans'.[157] In addition, Millat is aware that people like him have no representation in Britain: 'he knew he had no face in this country, no voice in the country'.[158] Due to his sense of alienation and the amount of stereotyping he encounters in the metropolis, Millat develops a hybrid identity. We can then easily draw a parallel between him and the character of Karim from Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* because Millat too is very often basically considered to be 'a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories'.[159] In other words, since he is never perceived as British by the members of the hegemonic culture due to his roots but at the same time considers London his home, Millat begins to feel that he belongs in Britain as well as in Bangladesh. Indeed, as the novel claims, Millat finds himself 'schizophrenic' with 'one foot in Bengal and one in Willesden' where he lives with his parents because 'in his mind' he belongs to 'two places at once'.[160] It can be argued that Millat's hybridity is an example of cosmopolitan creativity because it eventually allows him to become a real 'social chameleon' that knows how to socialise with the hegemonic culture in the metropolis as well as with his

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[156] Eva Knopp, ''There are no jokes in paradise' - Humour as a Politics of Representation in Recent Texts and Films from the British Migratory Contact Zone,' *Translation of Cultures,* eds. Petra Rudiger and K. Gros (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009) 70.

[157] Smith, 234.

[158] Smith, 234.

[159] Kureishi, 3.

[160] Smith, 219.

family and people of different racial backgrounds.[161] Yet hybridity also has its negative aspects - it is a possible source of pain for immigrants because they are devoid of any location where they can feel firmly rooted and safe. This is also Millat's case because, as the novel informs us, he is filled with 'anger' and 'the feeling of belonging nowhere that comes to people who belong everywhere'.[162]

How then does Millat move through the metropolis and view the spaces that surround him? Arguably, if Millat feels that he has one foot in Bengal and one in Willesden, he must be aware of the two spatial scales of London exactly like his father, Samad. In other words, Millat's character shows that the local and the global are intertwined because his hybrid identity is a product of his locally lived experience of the metropolis as well as the remnants of colonial history and his heritage about which he is constantly reminded by his parents and the white hegemonic culture. Yet while the hybrid first generation immigrants like his father are shown in 'a kind of spatial and psychological retreat' in London, Millat's urban existence is defined by 'discovery, emergence, risk, and real-world conflict'.[163] On one hand, Millat is in conflict with the hegemonic culture because he is a victim of stereotyping and racist comments as argued above. On the other hand, Millat is also involved in a generational conflict because his identity formations in London create tensions between him and his parents. At first, Millat's parents find him corrupted by the West because he drinks alcohol, chases white girls and smells of tobacco. Then after many years of struggling to belong in the metropolis, Millat decides to distance himself from such aspects of Western culture, which is what differentiates him, for example, from Kureishi's Karim in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. While Karim continues to live according to Western values throughout the whole novel because he learns to embrace that he is English and historically connected to Indians at the same time, Millat's confusion about his identity leads him to religious fundamentalism. Millat joins a group called KEVIN, the extremist Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation, and he begins to criticise Western morals - especially Western women whom he begins to shame for their clothing and sexuality. However, Millat's religious faith is

[161] Smith, 269.

[162] Smith, 269.

[163] Ball, 225.

incredibly superficial and his interest in becoming a member of KEVIN can only be read as his desperate attempt to belong to some sort of a unified group in London or as seizing 'an opportunity to express his own, personal anger against a society that has systematically alienated him'.[164] Indeed, as Santesso claims, 'Millat has no actual spiritual connection to Islam (he refuses to read both the Quran and the political pamphlets produced by KEVIN) and sees it merely as an opportunity to exercise … violence'.[165] This transformation of Millat also starts a conflict between him and his parents because they see that their son is not a real Muslim and they are against his behaviour. To them, Millat is a 'fully paid-up green-bow-tie-wearing fundamentalist terrorist' and somebody who calls himself a follower of Islam but is nothing but a criminal.[166]

Being a second generation immigrant, Millat navigates the urban space of London really well. While we see his mother move mostly only around Willesden and his father commute from Willesden to his job in the city centre, Millat does not seem confined to any specific area and he travels around London quite a lot. We witness Millat as he travels on a bus from Willesden 'through Kensal Rise, to Portobello, to Knightsbridge' and observes how the city landscape and its inhabitants change as he gets closer to the 'bright white lights of town'.[167] The novel also informs us that, during his puberty, Millat is really popular in Cricklewood, Willesden, West Hampstead and generally throughout North London. In addition, Millat attends some meetings of KEVIN in the borough of Brent, walks through Soho and, at the end of the novel, we can see his journey on public transport through Charing Cross to the very centre of London where he finds himself on Trafalgar Square. It is important to pay attention especially to two of these instances of Millat moving through the urban space. First, it is Millat's experience of Trafalgar Square. When he arrives on the square, he finds the bench where his father carved his name and looks at the statue of Sir Henry Havelock who decided about the execution of Samad's great-grandfather, Mangal Pande. While Samad views his signature on the bench as his way of wanting to write his name on the world, the second generation Millat interprets it as the only mark Samad has left on the metropolis, and

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[164] Santesso, 109.

[165] Santesso, 109.

[166] Smith, 407.

[167] Smith, 164.

therefore as a failure of his father to achieve anything of substance in London. As Dave Gunning claims, Millat then 'easily extends this belief to Pande: 'Pande was no one and Havelock was someone … *Don't you see, Abba? … That's the long history of us and them*'.[168] Therefore, for Millat too Trafalgar Square with its statue of Havelock represents a reminder of colonisation and how colonial history led to the marginalisation of immigrants in London but he believes that the task of his generation is to revenge this and 'turn that history around'.[169] The second significant moment of Millat moving through the space of London is his walk through Soho:

> […] Deep in a blue funk, Millat resolved to walk … home, beginning in Soho, glaring at the leggy whores and the crotchless knickers and the feather boas. By the time he reached Marble Arch he had worked himself into such a rage he called Karina Cain … and dumped her unceremoniously. … Walking slower now, dragging his heels … he got waylaid in the Edgware Road … Millat liked to watch [women in full purdah]: the animated talk, the exquisite colours of the communicative eyes, the bursts of laughter from invisible lips.[170]

In the passage quoted above, we witness Millat as he walks around on his own and observes the urban space around him and its inhabitants. We do not see Millat talk to either the women in Soho or those on Edgware Road - to the contrary, he watches them from the distance. At first sight, this passage in the novel may seem reminiscent of postcolonial flânerie because we are dealing with an immigrant character who does not engage with the crowd and remains in the role of a critical observer in the urban space. Nevertheless, this work argues that the theory of the postcolonial flâneur that was discussed in the introduction does not fully apply to Millat. This is because Millat, unlike Nazneen in the previous chapter, does not contrast himself with the crowd that he observes and the walk does not bring him to any new understanding of his own body and identity. That is to say, Millat does not compare himself to

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[168] Dave Gunning, *Race and Antiracism in Black British and British Asian Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010) 135.

Smith, 506.

[169] Smith, 506.

[170] Smith, 374.

the Londoners he spots during his stroll through the city. To the contrary, Millat compares the Western women with those who come from the East. What is interesting about this is the fact that Millat is described as enjoying looking at the women in full purdah but he is 'glaring' at the women in Soho, which implies the contempt he feels towards Western culture that he has recently turned away from. In this sense, this passage in *White Teeth* can be read as Millat's rejection of the culture in his location.

Another character that Smith's novel pays a lot of attention to is Clara Bowden. Clara is often defined by critics as a first generation immigrant of the Caribbean diaspora in Britain because she originally comes from Jamaica - she arrived in London with both of her parents, who are also considered first generation immigrants. During her early days in London, when she lives in Lambeth, Clara continues to be raised by her mother according to her faith: she is a Jehovah's Witness pushing onto her daughter the fear of the End of the World that the religion has prophesied. Nevertheless, as many young people, Clara soon starts to feel that she does not want to live the same type of life as her parents. Clara thinks that she should define her own identity in the Western culture and she begins to search for possible ways to escape her mother's influence. Therefore, being a young British-Jamaican woman, Clara experiences a generational conflict in the metropolis. Yet what is very interesting about the character of Clara is the fact that the generational conflict in her family is not portrayed as stemming from her increasing preference for British culture but rather from her rejection of her mother's religion and strict upbringing. We witness Clara as she begins to change in London, especially after falling in love with a white boy, Ryan Topps. Indeed, while she goes to an Irish Catholic school where her mother sends her, Ryan introduces her to a very different type of life full of scooter rides, drugs and a large squat in North London by which he pushes 'the End of the World further and further into the back-rooms of Clara's consciousness'.[171] Under Ryan's influence in the metropolis, Clara transforms physically by wearing different, possibly more revealing Western clothes, which make her look in the eyes of the Jehovah's Witnesses as 'a loose woman' but she also completely loses her religion.[172] Essentially then, Clara is a hybrid and a marginal character in London because she has been exposed to two different cultural

[171] Smith, 38.

[172] Smith, 43.

traditions and does not fit completely into either of them: she is a black woman with roots in Jamaica who, nevertheless, speaks decent English and gravitates towards various aspects of British culture, such as its fashion and lack of religiosity.

Clara's perception of the urban space in London is really fascinating from the beginning because her cultural marginality and the dissatisfaction with living with her strict and religious mother are reflected in Clara's view of London from the family's flat. Indeed, the novel tells us that Clara spends a lot of her time sitting in the Bowden living room that has 'bars on its window' and is 'just below the street level', which shows how imprisoned Clara feels with her mother in Lambeth.[173] Since the room offers only a partial view of the street, all Clara ever sees of London are 'feet, wheels, car exhausts' and 'swinging umbrellas', which further symbolises her marginality as well as her inability to experience the city under her mother's influence.[174] As a result, Clara knows that she has to leave her location to be happier and she finds that the easiest way to escape the 'listless reality of life in a ground-floor flat in Lambeth' is with the help of a man.[175] While Ryan originally represents somebody who could possibly take Clara away from her surroundings, he converts to Jehovah's Witnesses, and therefore ceases to be an option. Clara then marries the first man whom she finds appropriate to be her 'saviour' - 'a rather short, rather chubby, middle-aged white man in a badly tailored suit' named Archie Jones whom she meets at a party and whom she does not really love.[176] It must be noted here that Clara's reason for marriage is very telling about the rest of her general experience of the metropolis in the novel. As argued in the introduction, gender plays a big role in everyday dwelling in the city for immigrants and Clara seems to be a woman raised to adhere to conventional, socially constructed gender roles. As a result, she relies on men to save her and to take her away from Lambeth rather than making any plans herself. Moreover, during her married life with Archie, Clara continues to adhere to the role she believes she should have. Therefore, the only identity that Clara eventually performs in London is that of a

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[173] Guignery, 170.
Smith, 30.

[174] Smith, 30.

[175] Smith, 45.

[176] Smith, 45.

wife and a mother, which makes her largely confined to the domestic sphere, exactly like Samad's wife, Alsana.

After their marriage, Clara moves with Archie from South London to Willesden. On the way there, Clara carefully observes the area from the moving van:

> […] What kind of place *was* this? … she'd seen the high road and it had been ugly and poor and familiar … but then at the turn of a corner suddenly roads had exploded in greenery, beautiful oaks, the houses got taller, wider and more detached, she could see parks, she could see libraries. And then abruptly the trees would be gone, reverting back into bus-stops as if by the strike of some midnight bell; … Then finally the van slowed down in front of a house, a nice house somewhere midway between the trees and the shit … it was nice - not the promised land - but *nice*, nicer than anywhere she had ever been.[177]

Earlier in this chapter, the work talks about the opinion of Alsana on the same district of London. However, while Alsana contrasts Willesden specifically with East London, Clara goes further than exploring how Willesden varies from her previous area, Lambeth. Clara actually points out the surprising differences within Willesden itself. In other words, as Guignery claims, 'this quotation illustrates the contrasts between rich and poor areas within a single London district'.[178] This is certainly a really interesting scene for our discussion because, while it was previously argued that different London neighbourhoods provide varying outlooks on the city, Smith's novel shows that even one particular area of London can be full of visual and social differences. In fact, *White Teeth* puts a lot of emphasis on the diversity of Willesden. Willesden is depicted in the novel as both rich and poor; it is a highly multicultural district where the white British people live next to immigrants from Australia as well as the British-Caribbeans like Clara and the British-South Asians like Samad and Alsana; it is an area where somebody finds '*Mali's Kebabs*, *Mr Cheungs*, *Raj's*' and '*Malkovich Bakeries*' all on one street.[179] At the same time, as argued earlier, Willesden stands in

[177] Smith, 47.

[178] Smith, 47.

[179] Smith, 62,

opposition to other areas of the city in the novel, such as the city centre full of members of the hegemonic culture. However, this centre is also a meeting point of all kinds of nationalities and races of people: after all, it is where all of the immigrants from the novel travel in the end to attend Marcus Chalfen's event in the Perret Institute and find that the place is guarded by a Polish nightwatchman and cleaned by a Nigerian lady. All of this makes London in *White Teeth* a true carnival because the novel shows the metropolis as a contact zone where people from all over the world come to live and perform various types of identities and where history of the empire mixes with the present. Moreover, the novel stresses the polyphony of voices which is at heart of Bakhtin's carnivalesque: it introduces us to characters from different cultural backgrounds and stresses the mingling of people and cultures within the urban space. Most importantly, Smith's *White Teeth* shows that some oppressed members of society go as far as rioting and acting out against the hegemonic culture in an attempt to liberate themselves from its established social hierarchy, which is another one of the attributes of the carnivalesque that can be found in the novel. Indeed, as argued in the introduction, Bakhtin's carnivalesque builds on the concept of medieval carnival where individuals from various classes switched their roles and social classes were suspended while the participants parodied or mimicked the dominant culture. Such attempts at temporary reversal of roles are present in *White Teeth* in the minds of two particular characters - the violent boy Millat, who attacks white people and states that his generation needs to revenge the past and turn colonial history around, but especially his father, Samad, who symbolically reverses the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised in his head by carving his name in a bench in central London. Smith here surely continues in the tradition of writers like Rushdie, who is known for his portrayals of London as a carnival: Rushdie too often constructs London as a multicultural space in his writing and illustrates the multivocality of the Western metropolis as well as the potential for the carnivalesque reversal of social roles in the postcolonial city. That is to say, like *White Teeth*, *The Satanic Verses* shows features of the carnivalesque. For example, in the following passage from the Club Hot Wax:

> […] Attendants move toward the tableau of hate-figures, pounce upon the night's sacrificial offering, the one most often selected, if truth be told; at least three times a week. Her permawaved coiffure, her pearls, her suit of blue. *Maggie-maggie-maggie*, bays the crowd. *Burn-burn-burn.* … And O how prettily she melts, from the

> inside out, crumpling into formlessness. Then she is a puddle, and the crowd sighs in ecstasy: *done*.[180]

In this scene of *The Satanic Verses*, we see a group of immigrants who are excited about burning an effigy of Margaret Thatcher, the Prime Minister of the country where they live and where they feel oppressed. By destroying the effigy and celebrating the moment, the immigrants find themselves in the position of power because they perform 'a comic uncrowning and humiliation of the supreme authority figure in the country'.[181] This act is of course incredibly reminiscent of traditional carnival practices, which makes the carnivalesque in *The Satanic Verses* possibly more explicit than that in Smith's debut. However, as argued above, we find the carnivalesque idea of momentary inversion of hierarchies in some form in both novels.

The last character of *White Teeth* that must be discussed is Irie Jones. Irie is Clara and Archie's daughter, which makes her a second generation immigrant of the Caribbean diaspora in Britain. When it comes to Irie, the novel pays a lot of attention to her looks and it often reminds us that she is visibly a mixed race girl. Like Millat, Irie is a victim of the stereotypes that the white British have about people of different races. When she first visits the Chalfens with Millat, the question about where the children are from originally is directed at her as well as Millat because both Millat and the biracial Irie look exotic to Joyce Chalfen. In other words, Joyce expects Irie to come from a foreign country purely because she is not white. Consequently, since Irie is constantly reminded of her physical difference by the members of the hegemonic culture in London, she develops an obsession with her looks and begins to feel like a hybrid. That is to say, Irie is hybridised because she was born in London and grows up considering herself British but her body always serves as a reminder of her cultural roots in Jamaica. Irie would like to be slender and delicate like '*English Rose*' but she has a 'substantial Jamaican frame, loaded with pineapples, mangos and guavas' and 'big tits, big butt, big hips, big thighs, big teeth', which generally makes her the opposite of white

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[180] Rushdie, 293.

[181] Mittapalli Rajeshwar and J. Kuortti, *Salman Rushdie: New Critical Insights* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 2003) 176.

standards of beauty.[182] In consequence, Irie finds it difficult to find any reflection of herself in London and its culture: 'There was England, a gigantic mirror, and there was Irie, without reflection. A stranger in a stranger land.'[183] Irie's inability to find an image of herself in her location is later stressed in the novel when she reads one of Shakespeare's sonnets in class with her teacher:

> […] 'All right. Have you got anything to say about the sonnets?'
> 'Yes.'
> 'What?'
> 'Is she black?'
> 'Is who black?'
> 'The dark lady.'
> 'No, dear, she's dark. She's not black in the modern sense. There weren't any … well, Afro-Carri-bee-yans in England at that time, dear.' … Irie reddened. She had thought, just then, that she had seen something like a reflection, but it was receding; so she said, 'Don't know, Miss.'[184]

As the quotation shows, Irie initially thinks that the sonnet is about a woman with dark complexion like hers. Nevertheless, when her teacher explains that the dark lady was most probably white, Irie is disappointed. Therefore, as Ulrike Tancke argues, Irie is 'unable to fully engage in what is perceived as the epitome of English national culture': while Irie momentarily thinks that she found 'a parallel of her own self-awareness' in the sonnet, the 'authoritative reading of Shakespeare' by her teacher 'asserts a monolithic view of Englishness and silences Irie's struggle to find a space for herself'.[185] This shows how estranged and hybridised Irie is destined to feel in London during her whole life because of her dark skin and Jamaican roots.

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[182] Smith, 221.
Smith, 267.

[183] Smith, 266.

[184] Smith, 271.

[185] Ulrike Tancke, 'Beyond '*Helpless Heterogeneity*',' *Transnationalism and Resistance: Experience and Experiment in Women's Writing*, eds. Adele Parker and S. Young (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013) 240.

Irie constantly shows some desire to look white despite her 'Otherness'. This manifests, for example, in how she treats her body. Not only that she wants to lose a lot of weight but she also longs to change her afro hair. She eventually ends up going to a salon in Willesden and tells the local hairdresser that she wants to have 'straight long black sleek flickable tossable shakeable touchable finger-through-able wind-blowable hair', which can be read as Irie's attempt to mimic whiteness in London.[186] Nevertheless, no matter what she does to her hair, Irie will never really look like white women. That is to say, Irie's racial hybridity will always be visible. Smith's novel wonderfully emphasises this by the scene in the salon where the hairdresser, in an attempt to straighten the girl's hair, burns Irie's scalp with chemicals, and therefore 'fails to disguise her origins'.[187] Although Irie eventually ends up getting a weave of long straight hair in the salon and she thinks that she achieved her desired transformation, Alsana's niece Neena and her girlfriend make Irie aware of how terrible her hair looks and that it did not even originally belong to a white girl but to an oppressed woman of colour. Therefore, as Alghamdi claims, the irony of the matter is … that Irie's supposedly 'white' transformation' in London comes 'from a crop of purchased *Indian* hair'.[188] Irie also surrounds herself by a number of white people in the metropolis, especially the Chalfen family. At first, Irie is only fascinated by the Chalfens because they are incredibly different from her own parents. However, Irie soon ends up developing a strong bond with them and begins to spend most of her time in their house. Arguably, the Chalfens represent the kind of family that Irie would like to have because they are middle-class intellectuals who know a lot about their roots while her family is partially made up of immigrants who are often unsure about the history of their ancestors and it bothers her. As Michael Perfect then aptly claims, Irie visits the Chalfen household to escape her own because 'while her own family seem to be characterised by turmoil and irrationality, the Chalfens seem to offer stability and reason and she finds herself desperately wanting to be part of them'.[189] However, the whiteness of the Chalfens itself is also a huge factor in Irie's perception of the family. According to Ginette

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[186] Smith, 273.

[187] Hadjetian, 77.

[188] Alghamdi, 121.

[189] Perfect, 91.

Curry, Irie is fascinated by the Englishness of the Chalfens and by the 'racial purity' that 'exudes from them': nevertheless, she ignores the fact that the Chalfens themselves are a third generation immigrants with roots in several countries in Eastern Europe, and therefore they are not pure at all.[190] Consequently, it can be argued that during most of the novel's plot, Irie's urban existence in London is defined by her obsession with whiteness, British culture and white Britons, with whom she desperately wants to merge.

Similarly to Millat, Irie navigates the English capital well because it is where she grew up. She is in no way limited by her gender in the metropolis and, unlike her mother, Irie does not rely on men when she wants to escape from her surroundings. We see Irie as she freely moves around Willesden: she attends her school there and goes on regular visits to the Chalfens. However, we also witness her travel on public transport from Willesden through Kensal Rise, Portobello and Knightsbridge to the city centre with Millat when they are children and she finds it easy to take a night bus to Lambeth to see her grandmother after not visiting her for six years, which implies that Irie must have a relatively good knowledge of London's geography. Nevertheless, it has to be stressed that Irie moves around the area of Willesden the most: she has known the streets 'her whole life' and there are routes she has 'walked a million times over'.[191] Irie eventually shows interest in traveling the world after her studies because, as she says, she feels that she has 'lived in this bloody suburb all [her] life' and needs a change.[192] When she is not allowed to leave the country because Clara and Archie disagree with her travel plans, Irie is mad and she at least temporarily relocates within London itself and stays in Lambeth with her grandmother, Hortense. What is interesting about Irie's physical change of location in the metropolis is that staying with Hortense gives her a new outlook on her life in London and she ceases to be obsessed with whiteness and the Chalfens. This is because Irie finds a lot of documents, newspaper articles, photographs and books in Hortense's place which finally allow her to create an image of the history and roots of her mother and grandmother in Jamaica. In fact, Irie becomes fascinated by all the information she finds about her maternal lineage to the point that it suddenly becomes 'tiring and

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[190] Ginette Curry, *'Toubab La!' Literary Representations of Mixed-Race Characters in the African Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009) 425.

[191] Smith, 402.

[192] Smith, 377.

unnecessary' to her to continue the 'struggle to force something out of the recalcitrant English soil' and she begins to view Jamaica as an idyllic place that could be her '*homeland*'.[193] As the novel says:

> […] She [Irie] laid claim to the past - *her version of the past* [my emphasis] - aggressively, as if retrieving misdirected mail. So *this* was where she came from. This all *belonged* to her, her birthright, like a pair of pearl earrings or a post office bond.[194]

In the passage quoted above, we clearly see that Irie constructs Jamaica as a completely mythic place in her head, an imaginary homeland where she thinks she might find happiness because she does not feel that she belongs in London. Indeed, as Curry claims, the Jamaica of Irie's mind 'becomes a place where she experiences a rebirth, and an erasure of her past self that tried to identify with the Chalfens' - she tries to 'shed her English identity' and 'embraces her so-called homeland'.[195] Moreover, when Hortense offers Irie the option to travel to Jamaica with her in the year 2000 to witness another prophesied end of the world, Irie happily accepts, which further proves that she is dissatisfied and alienated in London. What eventually happens to Irie in *White Teeth* is then quite similar to the ending of Karim's storyline in *Brick Lane* - like Karim, Irie is willing to leave the metropolis and look for a sense of belonging in the country of her ancestors and her decision to go there is based on nothing but information attained from various outside sources. Therefore, similarly to Karim who has never been to Bangladesh, Irie has no personal experience with Jamaica but she wants to go there in hope to finally belong. Naturally, both of these characters fail to realise that they will be perceived as foreigners in their imaginary homelands because they are Londoners and their first language is English. In this sense, Irie, like Karim, ends in a state of self-delusion, falsely hoping that her life will make more sense in a different geographical location.

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[193] Smith, 402.

[194] Smith, 400.

[195] Curry, 295.

4. *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*

Meera Syal's *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* is certainly a very different novel from the previously discussed *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane* when it comes to its characters. While *Brick Lane* focuses predominantly on first generation immigrant characters and *White Teeth* tells the story of both first and second generation immigrants in great detail, *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* is almost exclusively concerned with the experience of second generation immigrants. That is to say, although Syal's novel does make short digressions that inform the reader about the life of some first generation immigrants, none of them serve as main characters but always remain in the background. Another factor that distinguishes *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* from the previously discussed two novels is its setting. While *Brick Lane* includes passages set in both London and Bangladesh and *White Teeth* takes us to Jamaica, Bangladesh and continental Europe while most of the story remains set in London, the whole plot of Syal's novel is strictly confined to the area of the English capital. In general, *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* unfolds the personal stories of three young female friends living in the Western metropolis. Since the three women live various lifestyles, the discussion on the following pages must pay attention to how the individual characters differ from each other. However, it is also necessary to explore how the young females contrast themselves against their parents' generation and the roles of their partners in the novel must be also included in the analysis.

The most page space in *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* seems to be devoted to the character of Tania Tendon. Since we learn in the novel that Tania was born in London but her parents had come to settle in the Western metropolis from India, she must be defined as a second generation immigrant of the South Asian diaspora in Britain. Like most young immigrants in the West, Tania becomes caught between the culture of the East that is passed onto her by her family that she grew up with and the values and lifestyle of the hegemonic culture in the British metropolis. As a result, Tania is certainly a hybrid character because she exemplifies how several elements of different cultures can be mixed within one single individual. Moreover, it is also in the character of Tania where the novel illustrates the typical instability of immigrant identities and shows that they never stay the same because they are always in motion. Indeed, the narrator of *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* informs us that Tania herself considers culture to be 'a moveable feast' and that there are people, things and beliefs

in her life that she can 'pick up or discard' when she chooses during her time in the metropolis.[196] This suggests that Tania is aware of the creative capacity of the immigrant hybrid figures like her to perform various identities and embrace some specific aspects of their Eastern cultural heritage as well as elements of the Western culture that they grew up in while rejecting many others.

Tania's hybridity is very clear in the novel from the beginning. When we first encounter the young woman, she is attending the traditional Eastern wedding of her friend Chila and she does not feel comfortable there. While her parents tried to raise her up according to their reterritorialised traditions and wanted to arrange a marriage for her in London in which she would become the dutiful wife of some South Asian immigrant, the second generation Tania found such expectations of her constraining because she wanted to perform a different identity in the city. As a result, she had to break away from the influence of her community and the wedding reminds her of this:

> […] She [Tania] suddenly remembered why she had stopped attending community events, cultural evenings, bring-a-Tupperware parties, all the engagements, weddings and funerals that marked out their borrowed time here. She could not take the proximity of everything any more … why her life wasn't following the ordained patterns for a woman of her age, religion, height and income bracket. The sheer physical effrontery of her people, wanting to be inside her head, to own her, claim her, preserve her. Her people.[197]

What is interesting about this passage is the fact that it portrays Tania's ability to consciously distance herself from her cultural heritage in the metropolis. She believes that she has partially 'escaped' her roots by growing up and moving far away from her relatives to start her own life as an independent and Westernised woman with a white English partner.[198] Nevertheless,

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[196] Meera Syal, *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (London: Anchor, 2000) 148.

[197] Syal,15.

[198] John McRae and R. Carter, *The Routledge Guide to Modern English Writing: Britain and Ireland* (Abingdon: Psychology Press, 2004) 127.

even Tania knows that one can never truly abandon one's roots completely and that she cannot reject her cultural heritage as a whole. To paraphrase, although she does not follow most Eastern traditions and habits and feels that she does not belong among the British-South Asians who reterritorialise Eastern traditions in London, Tania is aware that the immigrants she meets at the wedding are still 'her people', i.e. she is of the same race, speaks the same language, she is historically connected to them and this connection can never disappear and must pervade her entire life in the West. This illustrates that Tania is a hybrid character: she feels and acts like a Westerner in London because she was born and raised there and certainly prefers English culture but she also accepts that her Punjabi roots are an inherent part of her identity that she cannot get rid of.

The hybridity of Tania is observed even by her two closest friends, Chila and Sunita, during the wedding in East London:

> […] Sunita and Chila feared they might lose her, when Tania broke loose from her traditional moorings and drifted into an uncharted ocean with her English man and snappy Soho job. … when she did breeze in … she seemed to drag the world in with her, full of possibilities, on spiky heels. … although, Sunita noticed, Tania still sat like one with them, crossed legs, shoes off, unknotting herself in a way that suggested, *despite her protestations* [my emphasis], that part of her still responded to them like Home.[198]

This statement in the novel further proves that Tania straddles two cultures. As a hybrid second generation character, she feels comfortable living and working in Soho among members of the white hegemonic culture - however, she still feels somehow comfortable and at home with her old friends as well, although they did not distance themselves from their Eastern cultural heritage as much as her. While, as was argued above, she avoids Eastern habits and complains about the lifestyle of many British-South Asians that adhere to them, she makes exceptions and remains friends with some people, such as Chila and Sunita, who are representative of a lot of the traditions that she is highly critical of. Tania's bond with Chila and Sunita is then a good example of the creative potential of immigrant identities that was

[198] Syal, 18.

discussed earlier in this chapter: although Tania distances herself from 'her people' and what they believe in in favour of Western culture, she still, as Christine Vogt-William argues, 'does select certain aspects which apparently work for her in fashioning her identity' and the friendship with Chila and Sunita is one of them.[199] Naturally, besides the friendships, there are many specific elements of her Eastern cultural heritage that Tania embraces or even appreciates during her life despite remaining Westernised because she is a hybrid character. Indeed, several aspects of the East and the West mix in Tania's life: for example, we learn that she can speak Punjabi in addition to English and that she can hold a conversation in it, she is also described as somebody who likes Hindi films and songs as well as many Western ones and she remains interested in exploring the lives and problems of immigrants from South Asia while she works for British television despite her attempts to distance herself from the majority of such people on a personal level.

As argued in the introduction, London as a diaspora space becomes a place where the boundaries of belonging and otherness are contested and, as a result, many immigrant characters develop feelings of rootlessness. This is also the case of Tania in Syal's novel. Since she recognises that she has a connection to 'her people' as well as to the white British that she socialises with in Soho, she is eventually haunted by the feeling of belonging everywhere, and consequently nowhere. In this sense, the character of Tania is reminiscent, for instance, of the character of Millat in *White Teeth* that was discussed in the previous chapter. Indeed, what Tania shares with Millat is the common inability of the young second generation immigrant to feel firmly rooted and safe in just one culture: as the narrator of *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* says about the young woman, she is really 'used to not belonging anywhere totally'.[200] Tania is always 'too independent', 'too Western' and 'too modern' when she is among the community of British-South Asians and a 'Culture Clash Victim' and an 'Oppressed Third World Woman' in the eyes of the white British rather than their equal.[201] Therefore, wherever Tania goes or whatever she does, she experiences a 'sense of

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[199] Christine Vogt-William, *Bridges, Borders and Bodies: Transgressive Transculturality in Contemporary South Asian Diasporic Women's Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014) 176.

[200] Syal, 56.

[201] Syal, 150.

dislocation'.[202] It can be argued that in the first half of the novel, Tania deals with her alienation by focusing on her white English boyfriend, Martin. Nevertheless, she feels misunderstood by him because, like Joyce Chalfen and Poppy Burt-Jones in *White Teeth*, Martin adheres to many stereotypical images of South Asians. Martin perceives Tania as exotic and fails to realise that his girlfriend is not and cannot be 'the genuine article' due to her immigrant status and the general absurdity of authentic cultural identities; he constantly complains about her 'lack of native culture'.[203] Consequently, the hybrid Tania is lonely and out of place with him and, in the second half of the novel, she starts to turn towards her roots a bit more. Eventually, she entertains 'a yearning for a South Asian soulmate who approximates a form of South Asianness that she can define for herself'; the young woman who spent years being interested only in white English men suddenly becomes jealous of her friend Chila married to a second generation immigrant and she longs 'to be called 'jaan' - a Punjabi term of endearment - in her desire to feel that she belongs somewhere'.[204] Consequently, Tania starts an affair with Chila's husband, Deepak, which can be read, according to Vogt-William, as her 'metaphorical return to India' through a relationship with a South Asian diasporic man.[205] Nevertheless, Deepak represents a lot of the traditional values that Tania felt the need to escape from in the first place: Deepak thinks that women should perform the roles of dutiful wives and that they are to be owned and controlled, which is clearly visible in his treatment of his wife. Therefore, Tania could never really be happy with him because she would have to lose her independence in the metropolis. She would be forced to become a lot like the women of her mother's generation whom she compares to prisoners without bars because they lived for their husbands, they were women with 'plans, boundaries, a place' and she does not want such lifestyle.[206] As a result, it must be argued that Tania's whole urban existence is defined by rootlessness and an endless oscillation between two different cultures as she desperately wants to belong somewhere fully but cannot.

It is now necessary to focus on Tania's movement through London and discuss how

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[202] Syal, 56.

[203] Syal, 146.

[204] Vogt-William, 177.

[205] Vogt-William, 213.

[206] Syal, 111.

she views and moves around the urban space. Like many second generation immigrants, Tania is certainly aware of the fact that London has two spatial scales - the local and the global. This is because Tania's hybrid identity, like Millat's in *White Teeth*, is a product of her locally lived experience of the English capital as well as the remnants of colonial history and her heritage about which she is always reminded by the white British who misunderstand her origins and project their stereotypes onto her. Moreover, also like Millat, Tania is obviously able to navigate the urban space of London really well because it is where she grew up and she moves around the city a lot throughout the novel. As argued in the introduction, gender plays a large role in how characters in postcolonial literature experience the city and it can be claimed that Tania is not limited by her gender in her exploration of the urban space at all, especially due to her rejection of the traditional role of the dutiful housewife that was touched upon above. Tania recalls being taught 'a spatial exercise' when she was younger; as a girl she was told by her mother to 'take up as little room as possible', 'read the moods of everyone in the room and flow smoothly about them', 'walk in small steps', 'refill plates' and 'save any rages and rumbles for the privacy of [her] dark room'.[207] However, Tania was never going to perform such a limiting role in the metropolis because it did not fit her interests and personality. Consequently, while some of her female friends, her mother and most of the first generation immigrant women spend most of their time devoted to domesticity because they adhere to socially and culturally constructed gender roles, Tania, who rejected them, enjoys the freedom to move between the private and the public sphere in London. As a result, we see the young woman at the wedding with her friends Chila and Sunita in the district of Leyton, we know she goes to work, attends parties in Soho where she lives, shoots a documentary down Brick Lane, drives across Tower Bridge and visits friends in places like Ilford.

This also allows us to say that Tania moves freely between the city centre where she lives and the margins, e.g. East London, where she grew up. Nevertheless, in order to be able to do that, Tania had to undertake the journey from East London and reach the centre first and build a career there. Interestingly, it seems to be exactly Tania's marginal position in society as an immigrant with South Asian heritage and her 'beauty' that become her 'passport out of

[207] Syal, 145.

East London' and that allow her to live 'in cosmopolitan circles'.[208] Indeed, Tania's successful passage from the margins to the city centre seems to be possible because of her determination but also her looks and heritage. It is not only her boyfriend with whom she lives in central London who considers her exotic but also the people she works for. There are many instances in the novel where it becomes obvious that Tania's employers in Soho exploit her cultural roots for their benefit: they constantly encourage her to produce pieces about immigrants of the South Asian diaspora in Britain because she is one of them and they want to cash in on the marketability of immigrant identities to white British audiences who have certain unrealistic and stereotypical perceptions of what it means to have roots in the East. Her white bosses think that she should embrace 'the ghetto' she comes from because it 'got [her] where [she is] today' and what makes her 'different'; they want her to create films about immigrant lives.[209] Nevertheless, Tania is not really a victim in this case because she follows their instructions without much resistance. Indeed, as Devon Campbell-Hall claims, Tania herself 'conveniently calls upon the cultural marketability of her ethnic heritage' in the centre of the metropolis 'whenever it suits': 'searching for that cutting-edge subject that will make her reputation as an 'ethnic' filmmaker, she scrolls 'through her proposal ideas: the new Asian underground music scene, the Harley Street scam in replacement hymen surgery for Asian and Saudi women, the ballot kings of Birmingham''.[210] It was argued in the introduction that mimicry is a part of the hybrid condition and, during her career, Tania also begins to exemplify mimicry when she performs her role of an 'ethnic' film maker for her bosses: the modern second generation immigrant woman parades herself as the 'Asian babe kicking ass' that they want her to be and exaggerates her roots by sitting patiently during photoshoots where she gets 'photographed against the backdrop of saris and spices' and 'in the bustling kitchen of a tandoori restaurant' for promotion materials to sell her films.[211] This is where we can find a similarity between *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* and *The Buddha of Suburbia.* Like Syal's Tania, Kureishi's protagonist Karim begins to exemplify mimicry in his job - as an actor in central London, he

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[208] Syal, 18.

[209] Syal, 259.

[210] Devon Campbell-Hall, 'Writing Second-Generation Migrant Identity,' *Shared Waters: Soundings in Postcolonial Literatures,* ed. Stella Borg Barthet, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009) 302.
Syal, 63.

[211] Syal, 250.

performs Indian characters according to the stereotypical ideas of Indianness that the dominant culture in the metropolis has and his boss makes a lot of money out of it. Both Tania and Karim use mimicry in their workplace and, as a result, they use their immigrant identities in a creative manner and make them successfully marketable to the white British who are likely to be interested in anything 'exotic'. Therefore, it can be argued that Tania's experience of the centre of the Western metropolis is pervaded by constant marketing of her otherness and she is willing to sell it as a commodity.

Since Tania moves between the margins and the centre of London a lot, the book offers us images of the variety of the urban space that are filtered through her eyes. First, it is necessary to focus on her outlook on Soho that is wonderfully illustrated in the following passage:

> […] Tania led her brood right down the centre of Dean Street as the pavements were heaving with people, spilling out of restaurants and cafés … she pushed her way through a group of bemused cagoule-clad tourists, cameras aimed at a couple of drag queens who were arguing dramatically in a doorway. … Shiny happy people laughed on every corner: office workers, with their jackets on one shoulder and a girl in tan tights and a grateful smile on the other; the media wallahs in their uniform of distrait black and carefully unkept hair … The only ones who seemed unaware that this was officially the centre of cool were the pre-theatre patrons up from the suburbs, men in shiny jackets and women in Jaeger twinsets, trying to mind their table manners with half an eye on the passing tramps and other on the handbags under their seats, next to their matching shoes. Tania strode past them contemptuously. This was her patch now.[212]

The city centre of London is described here as an incredibly vibrant place. We see the second generation immigrant Tania as she passes drag queens, office workers, tramps, men and women from the suburbs and tourists all on one street. It is certainly here where Syal's novel hints at the carnivalesque multivocality of the Western metropolis and shows, exactly like *White Teeth* in the previous chapter, that central London is a meeting point of all kinds of nationalities, classes and races of people from all over the world. Individuals with different

[212] Syal, 53.

backgrounds and histories come to this 'centre of cool' and perform their identities although a large number of London's inhabitants only come to visit and then return to their homes on the margins, such as Tania's friends Chila and Sunita. Before moving to Tania's perception of East London, it is also necessary to briefly look at this particular passage from Soho with the theory of flânerie in mind. It is not possible to call Tania a flâneuse as such because, as discussed in the introduction, the figure is always defined as somebody who engages in solitary walking around the city and Tania is accompanied by her brood here. Moreover, she does not adopt the invisible stance of a flâneuse gaze that we could see in the discussion of Nazneen in the chapter about *Brick Lane* because she chats to her girlfriends and does not really think about her difference from the hegemonic culture at all. Nevertheless, Tania does exemplify some aspects that are at least reminiscent of postcolonial flânerie. First, as a second generation immigrant, Tania finds herself in the position of a critical observer of the urban space in this passage and she does not directly engage with any of the people that she sees around her. Second, as stated in the introduction, the diasporic flâneuse uses her walks as something that helps her make sense of her belonging and Tania does something quite similar here: she strides past the people from the suburbs with contempt because they remind her of the place she comes from and does not want to return to. In fact, looking at those suburban men and women while moving through Soho makes her aware of the fact that she does not belong in East London anymore and that the city centre is 'her patch now'.[213]

Whenever Tania comes to East London from the city centre, she thinks that she 'should have brought her passport' because visiting it feels like experiencing a completely foreign place.[214] While the city centre is described as a very exciting space, Tania personally finds everything she sees in East London mundane; as the narrator says: 'the predictability of it all depressed her'.[215] When she drives through the area where she used to live with her parents, she does not see office workers, tourists, tramps and drag queens but notices 'Indian women in white widow's weeds', 'early twenties Punjabi lad with goatee beard' and, as she continues along 'the broadway of Little India', she passes places run by immigrants - 'The

[213] Syal, 54.

[214] Syal, 40.

[215] Syal, 39.

Lotus Café', 'Pradeep's Sweet Mart', 'Lahori's Kebab Hut'.[216] This contrast between the centre and the area of East London where Tania used to live then proves McLeod's theory that was discussed in the introduction: different neighbourhoods of London offer varying perspectives on the city. Yet, it must be noted that despite the fact that Tania finds East London predictable, her movement through the location does not depict it only as a monotonous place inhabited by nobody else but immigrants from South Asia. Like *White Teeth* in the previous chapter, *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* shows that one particular area of London, in this case the whole of East London, can be incredibly diverse as well:

> […] There was border control, the Victorian police station on the corner which separated the Eastenders from the Eastern-Enders; on one side, auto-part shops and a McDonald's, on the other, Kamla's Chiffons and the beginning of two miles of sweet emporiums, café-dhabas, opulent jewellers and surprisingly expensive Asian fashion boutiques. It was possible, literally, to stand with a foot in each world on this corner.[217]

As Sumana Ray claims, this passage in the novel portrays East London as a multicultural place and shows 'the literal and metaphorical confluence of two working class communities, British and Asian' with 'a border simultaneously joining the Eastenders to the Eastern-Enders on the one hand and separating their distinctiveness on the other'.[218] Such description of London as a metropolis with obvious boundaries in Syal's book is then reminiscent of Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* where people live in 'little worlds' that 'contain and separate … cultures, keeping at a distance the different ethnic communities of the city'.[219] That is to say, Selvon's London also 'separates its inhabitants from one another' and, as Peter J. Kalliney argues, 'although it masses large numbers of people in the same space, this same

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[216] Syal, 41.

[217] Syal, 40.

[218] Sumana Ray, 'The Rise of the 'Liminal Briton': Literary and Artistic Productions of Black and Asian Women in the Midlands,' *University of Warwick Institutional Repository*, 2011, 2 July 2015 <http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/49169/>.

[219] James Procter, *Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) 46.

process enforces a degree of … detachment'.[220] Indeed, what we see in the passage quoted above is a reterritorialised area of East London where immigrants surely participate in the habits and traditions of their countries of origin despite living in the West and this part is visibly detached from yet another area of East London that is inhabited mostly by white population. By contrasting various parts of East London with each other as well as the margins with the city centre, Syal's book shows like the previously discussed *Brick Lane* and *White Teeth* that there are many different Londons and Londoners.

The next character that we have to pay attention to is Chila. Exactly like Tania, Chila is a young second generation immigrant woman of the South Asian diaspora in Britain because her parents originally come from India. Nevertheless, as we learn throughout the novel, her family also resided in Africa before moving to London. Chila finds herself in the metropolis from a very early age, which means that she gets accustomed to some aspects of British lifestyle but her roots and the culture of her parents' generation remain a large part of her identity due to her traditional Eastern upbringing in the West. As a result, Chila fulfils the definition of hybridity because she grows up in-between cultures. Indeed, there are several instances in the novel where it becomes clear that Chila's character combines elements of the West and the East. For example, we learn that as a little girl, she gets called 'Dark Dumbo' by her classmates in London because of her race and the people in her school assume that being a 'recent refugee from East Africa' she 'could not speak a word of English'.[221] Nevertheless, being a hybrid, Chila speaks Punjabi as well as great English. Her oscillation between two cultures then continues during her teenage years when Chila wears blusher, skips lessons to go to 'midday raves in town with Tans and Sunny' and sometimes 'sits in a dark corner with some strange bloke's tongue in [her] ear' while, at the same time, she is 'worried' that she throws away 'all the rules [her] parents had given [her]'.[222] Finally, even the very opening of the novel shows Chila to be caught between two cultures as she prepares for her wedding as an adult. On one hand, Chila freely and consensually participates in the Eastern ceremony that was planned and prepared for her by her family because she feels that keeping tradition and

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[220] Peter J. Kalliney, *Cities of Affluence and Anger: A Literary Geography of Modern Englishness* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006) 107.

[221] Syal, 20.

[222] Syal, 33.

marrying Deepak is the right thing to do. On the other hand, she would prefer to 'celebrate' and wear 'a floaty thing, all gossamer and light' like many brides in the West instead of being 'mummified in red and gold silk, swaddled in half the contents of Grupta's Gold Emporium, pierced, powdered and plumped up' so that her body would only 'walk the walk of everyone's mothers on all their weddings, meekly, shyly, reluctantly towards matrimony'.[223] Arguably, Chila's hybridity and appreciation for both Eastern and Western cultural aspects and practices then pervades her whole life in London and she does not fully belong among the white British nor the South Asian community in the metropolis.

Chila's existence in London is often contrasted with Tania's. Indeed, Chila and Tania have very different experiences of the city and outlook on the urban space: while it was argued above that Tania's movement through the Western metropolis is not in any way limited by her gender and she enjoys the private sphere as well as the public one throughout her whole life, the same cannot be said about Chila. Arguably, when Chila was a teenager and later an unmarried woman, she had the option to experience both spheres absolutely freely. She used to be able to spend time at home with her parents as well as go to school where she befriended Tania and Sunita with whom she explored the streets East London. Moreover, Chila pursued work when her friends went to college because she 'knew it was time to pick [herself] up and make something out of [her] life', although she felt 'like a baby bird pushed out from the nest'.[224] In her job 'at Leos on the check-out', Chila felt that she 'found [her] place' as she often talked to strangers and engaged with the public.[225] Yet everything changes after Chila's engagement to Deepak. As the introduction states, immigrant women in London can be associated strictly with the domestic sphere because of socially constructed gender roles, gender inequality and oppression within their communities. We already identified a great example of this in *Brick Lane* where Nazneen gets discouraged by her husband from pursuing education and work outside home and Chila in *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* experiences restrictions in the city because of her gender as well. When Chila and Deepak start living together, she starts to spend a lot of her time in the house. As she says in the novel:

[223] Syal, 14.

[224] Syal, 35.

[225] Syal, 35.

> […] I was up for promotion just before I got engaged to Deeps but he said no wife of his was going to work if she didn't want to. (I did want to as it happens but he forgot to ask me that bit.)[226]

While in *Brick Lane* we saw a patriarch who reterritorialised practices from the homeland of his memories, Bangladesh, where women traditionally stayed at home and took care of the family, here we have a second generation man whose behaviour has nothing to do with reterritorialisation of personal experiences from the East because he has never been there. Yet the London born Deepak is a hybrid character, 'Western enough to be trendy, Indian enough to be pukka'.[227] This naturally means that he lives according to British lifestyle in some respects but still chooses to adhere to many of the behaviours and traditions he learnt from his parents. It can be argued that Deepak's treatment of his wife, including discouraging her from work, is then one of the traditions of first generation immigrants that he adopts because he automatically expects Chila to give up her job and become dependent on him.

Interestingly, during the early stages of their marriage, Chila embraces the role she was given. As she says in the novel, she is 'happy catching up on … chat shows' and 'doing the little bits that make a house into a home': 'I am grateful, I admit it, especially for the little things. Like morning tea and seeing him off with a kiss and his briefcase, and planning what we'll eat when he comes home.'[228] In other words, Chila initially does not mind that she suddenly becomes a submissive wife tied to the domestic sphere in London. This of course does not mean that Chila never leaves the house once she marries. Deepak sometimes offers to take her along when he leaves the mansion and, unlike Nazneen in *Brick Lane*, Chila can go outside with her friends and even on her own without her husband's outright disapproval. However, Deepak proves to be controlling whenever Chila enters the public sphere, whether it is with him or Tania and Sunita. In fact, he constantly checks on Chila and sometimes even criticises what she says in front of other people when she is in public. For example, when she

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[226] Syal, 35

[227] Syal, 37.

[228] Syal, 37.

wants to go out to spend time with her friends, he spies on her 'parked with his lights off outside a neighbour's drive, pretending to read an old copy of the *Financial Times*'.[229] Chila is allowed to join Tania's project and is interviewed for one of her films but 'only when her hubby is working late' and then 'she always hurries back before he gets home'.[230] To conclude, we can argue that Deepak expects Chila to perform one type of identity in London - he wants her to be a housewife. The couple is then a great example of the way gender can play a big role in how individuals in postcolonial fiction experience the public sphere in the metropolis: while Deepak has a job and can go anywhere he wants in the city without ever being questioned because he is a man in a marriage with a patriarchal set up, his wife does not have the same amount of freedom - she does now work, she is often followed, controlled and, as she herself says, her 'world is small'.[231]

Indeed, Chila's world is not of great size - she spends most of her time in the London suburbs where she lives and it is only thanks to the influence of Tania that she gets to briefly visit other parts of the metropolis, such as Soho. Once Chila becomes a mother, her character undergoes an interesting change. Chila suddenly ceases to be satisfied with her 'small world' and spending her days engaging in mundane activities, such as cleaning the house, 'visiting the brand new Tescos in Grants Hill', 'having tea and samosas with her friend' Geeta and 'feeding old rotis to the swans at Snaresbrook Ponds'.[232] As Ray claims, giving birth in *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* is 'a symbolic journey' that enables Chila to 'undergo transformation' and liberates her from 'normative moorings' - her 'sense of identity becomes altered' and she is 'no longer bound by the fixity' that had prevented her 'from shifting positions': 'Chila … feels empowered to move positions to reorganise her disordered life'.[233] Indeed, after giving birth to her son, being cheated on by her husband and betrayed by Tania, Chila suddenly develops a lot more personal agency and it is also during this time that she begins to mentally distance herself from London and starts to seriously think of visiting India.

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[229] Syal, 72.

[230] Syal, 92.

[231] Syal, 34.

[232] Syal, 117.

[233] Ray, 168.

It was argued in the introduction that lives of second generation immigrants in the metropolis can be, to some extent, influenced by their parents' stories about homelands and longings for return and this is exactly what we see in the development of Chila's character in Syal's novel. Since her personal life in the West falls apart and she does not fully belong among the white British nor the South Asian community in London, as was indicated earlier during the discussion of her hybridity, Chila decides to abandon the Western city for the homeland of her parents in search for happiness for herself and her son. This final act of Chila is of course reminiscent of the ending of Irie's storyline in *White Teeth*. Like Irie, who decides to go to Jamaica because she is alienated in London and romanticises the country of her ancestors as somewhere she could belong, Chila wants to explore the country of origin of her parents although she has never been there because she has heard attractive things about it from her mother. Arguably, visiting India might educate Chila about her roots because she does not know enough about the life in the country. Nevertheless, like all hybrid characters, Chila is bound to feel out of place in India exactly like in London. In this sense, like many second generation immigrants, Chila falls for the false idea that moving to the country of origin of her parents can provide her with a better future and a sense of full belonging.

Sunita is the last character to be discussed in this chapter. She is a second generation immigrant of the South Asian diaspora in Britain because she was born in England and her mother and father originally come from India. As a result of growing up in her parents' household where she learns about Indian traditions while also being exposed to white British culture outside of it, Sunita is bound to live a 'double life'. As she says in the novel:

> […] Always the same stuff about family and duty and the double lives we were leading. Always proud to be who they were, but not scared to push back the boundaries, to redefine what being Asian meant. We were making history. We knew it as we were living it.[234]

What Sunita describes here is essentially the hybrid condition that she perceives in herself as well as many other young people born in London to first generation immigrants from the East.

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[234] Syal, 86.

She recognises that a young woman like her cannot live absolutely the same lifestyle like her parents and share all of their values because she is too influenced by her Western surroundings and she has never been to India. Sunita's hybridity, i.e. the mixing of Western and Eastern cultural aspects in her character, is apparent throughout the whole novel. First, she is a hybrid in terms of language because she can speak Hindi as well as English. Second, her hybridity is often visual. For example, when the book talks about her youth and university days, we learn that Sunita smokes and walks around in her Dr. Martens, boots produced by the classic British footwear brand, but at the same time wears her bindi, the forehead decoration typical for South Asia. Finally, Sunita is also a hybrid when it comes to her opinions and general outlook on her cultural belonging. She perceives South Asians as her 'brethren' that she should 'seek out' and have solidarity with because of their shared roots and skin colour but, at the same time, she knows that she does not necessarily have to 'like them', their opinions and lifestyle.[235] In fact, already during her university studies, Sunita joins feminist groups that fight against the patriarchal set up of society by which she also openly stands up against the practices of many immigrants from South Asia in Britain whose families traditionally follow the submissive wife/dominant husband pattern. That is to say, due to her hybrid identity, Sunita feels the freedom to adopt specific aspects of her Eastern cultural heritage as well as practices of the Western culture. Yet, as a result of her hybrid condition, Sunita always feels 'special and lonely'.[236] She is misunderstood by her family for whom her appearance and behaviour are simply too Western but also by the hegemonic culture in London, which is illustrated, for instance, in the mention of her first boyfriend to whom she always had to answer questions about her identity: 'I got bored of having to explain stuff all the time. How come my parents came over here? What did korma actually mean in my language? What was the dot on the forehead?'[237] Interestingly, it is Sunita's hybridity that eventually leads her to choosing a second generation immigrant as her partner rather than a white British man. Indeed, Sunita originally thinks that it will be easier for her to settle for somebody she 'could have a cultural shorthand with', i.e. somebody who will share her

[235] Syal, 85.

[236] Syal, 86.

[237] Syal, 86.

hybridity rather than question her about it.[238] As a result, she decides to marry Akash, whom she describes as 'the best of East and West in one perfectly formed package'.[239]

Nevertheless, Sunita's relationship with Akash dramatically transforms her identity from its early stages. She leaves the feminist group, fails her exams, marries and turns into the stereotypical Indian wife that she never wished to become. Indeed, as Ray claims, 'with passage of time and change in circumstances', Sunita is 'unconsciously … transformed into a conventional … married Indian woman' in London, her 'delicate, doll-like features … softened by the fleshy mantle worn by married Indian ladies … like a uniform'.[240] The marriage of Akash and Sunita then naturally leads us back to the question of how gender influences immigrant perceptions and experiences of the Western metropolis. Although Akash recognises that second generation immigrant men 'can change things' and 'redefine what being Asian and male or Asian and female means' because 'culture evolves and changes', he is also an example of how hard it is to dismantle the 'belief system' he learnt from his parents while growing up.[241] While he helps Sunita with various house chores, does not discourage her from work and lets her spend time outside the house during their married life in London, he still visibly prefers the idea of having a submissive partner like men of his father's generation. Exactly like Deepak in his relationship with Chila, Akash eventually proves to be rather controlling of Sunita and expects the role of a good wife and a mother to be her priority in London while he, as a man, can do anything he wants. Indeed, Akash expects Sunita to be 'a good Hindu girl' with traditional interests and even clothes.[242] Sunita does adopt this identity and performs it for a long time in their marriage: as the novel says when Sunita goes to Soho with Tania and Chila, she is 'always' at home apart from her work shifts and hardly goes out and makes time for herself.[243] All of this then makes Sunita 'an educated, intellectual and spirited … woman submerged under the weight of motherhood and domesticity' and the

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[238] Syal, 86.

[239] Syal, 89.

[240] Ray, 150.
Syal, 19.

[241] Ray, 103.

[242] Syal, 77.

[243] Syal, 69.

days of her marriage stand in contrast to her youth when she was more free to go anywhere she wanted and wear anything she desired.[244] In other words, Sunita is driven to the private sphere after stepping into a marriage with a man of South Asian descent in the Western metropolis and she sacrifices a lot of her potential for her husband and children.

As Vogt-William claims, Sunita eventually 'decides to take control of her own marital situation and lays down a few boundaries and rules of her own, in order to redefine her position in the marriage'.[245] As a result, she undergoes a very positive transformation. One day she comes home to her husband as a completely different woman:

> […] Sunita stroked her boyish hair which barely skimmed the fur-trim collar of her very expensive velvet box jacket, Lycra trousers and her soft leather cowboy boots. She smiled slightly, the tilt of her head revealing red and copper highlights shimmering in her crown … 'They told me that the Gwyneth Paltrow was out, so they did me the Natalie Imbruglia instead. Everything else I bought was on sale.'[246]

As the quote shows, we witness Sunita as she reclaims her female body which she spent years hiding under traditional clothes and considered it 'invaded' and taken away by her 'children, hair and cakes'.[247] It can be argued that this passage is significant because Sunita's visual makeover and body positivity go hand in hand with her inner transformation. Once she starts buying Western clothes and cuts her hair, she also slowly regains her feminist thought and chooses not to succumb to all sorts of patriarchal values anymore. She begins to read a lot of literature with feminist themes and realises that she does not have to '*be at home* [my emphasis] in a stained housecoat burning [her] fingers over a griddle' because she is a second generation immigrant who does not have to be weighed down by her motherhood and domesticity but can perform many other types of identities.[248] In other words, Sunita reclaims

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[244] Ray, 149.

[245] Vogt-William, 95.

[246] Syal, 204.

[247] Syal, 125.

[248] Syal, 243.

the ‘self’ that she lost in the relationship with Akash and she becomes empowered. This then reflects in her interaction with the Western metropolis. Sunita leaves her house more: she regularly goes to the hospital with the pregnant Chila where she befriends a young doctor, she takes the tube to go shopping for clothes, looks for a new career and even goes to a party on her own where she dances and rediscovers ‘her passions, her backbone, her legs’.[249] Her husband, who would prefer having a traditional submissive partner as was argued earlier, criticises her new looks and approach to life and he is visibly unhappy about having to stay at home to look after the children when his wife goes out. However, Sunita participates in the public sphere in London despite his protests and becomes a happier person.

Although she does not engage in any flâneuristic wanderings around the city in the novel, Sunita experiences various districts of London: we learn that she visits the West End instead of going to work where she also enjoys an evening in the area of Soho with Tania and Chila, she observes Canary Wharf from a terrace which looks out ‘over alleys and industrial yards’ and she lives in East London surrounded by many other immigrant families.[250] Sunita’s most detailed observation of the Western metropolis in the whole book then concerns East London and is presented to us in the form of her childhood memory:

> […] My mother would have to physically restrain me to apply water and Savlon, while the neighbours wondered if those Arabs at number thirty-two would ever stop beating their children. Later on, after we had moved from the village near Bolton where we were, literally the local colour, to the East End suburb where, God, I still am, we acquired lots of new neighbours who, joy of joys, looked just like us.[251]

This description of living in London provided by Sunita’s character ties in with some of the theory that was introduced in the beginning of this work. First of all, we can focus on the contrast between the rural and the urban life in England that the quote offers. While it is implied that the village near Bolton where Sunita spent her childhood was a largely white

[249] Syal, 227.

[250] Syal, 170.

[251] Syal, 73.

environment where being of South Asian descent meant being the odd one out, the metropolis is full of locations inhabited by immigrants where Sunita can blend in. This of course points at the two spatial views of London discussed in the first chapter and illustrates the fact that while London must be locally lived in by immigrant figures, it is also a global place and a postimperial contact zone where large numbers of people from all over the world come to settle and reterritorialise various areas. This then allows immigrants like Sunita and her parents to surround themselves by people who 'look just like [them]' in East London, which is a district with a substantial South Asian population where many people from the East reterritorialise the values and beliefs they were raised with in their countries of origin and continue to live according them.[252] Moreover, Sunita claims that once she moved to London with her parents, her dad 'stopped ordering a daily newspaper' because if her family 'wanted to know who was doing what in the world', all they had to do was 'pop next door'.[253] Arguably, it is here where *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* hints, yet again, at the multicultural aspect of London but also at the general multivocality of the postcolonial urban space. Sunita's statement then further proves that the Western metropolis is inhabited by many kinds of Londoners with different roots and histories who cross paths and mingle freely within its districts and neighbourhoods.

Finally, it is worth paying attention to the moment when Sunita attends the screening of Tania's film in The Buzz Bar. Syal's novel here looks at East London from a historical perspective through a detailed description of the venue's past:

> […] BACK IN VICTORIAN TIMES, THE BUILDING USED TO BE A workhouse, the largest in the East End of London … Fittingly, it then became a Jewish-owned warehouse; three generations of the Offenbachs lived on the premises … Bubby Offenbach … wept … when the Offenbach Brothers sign went down, and the Wahaab Brothers sign went up. Imran Wahaab once enjoyed watching the flimsy clouds float past the golden dome of the newly built mosque … But somewhere in the Seventies the steel shutters had to go up … But gradually, as his eyesight began failing and his children had children, a wonderful and strange thing happened: the poky café-dhabas … acquired large plate windows and eye-scorching neon signs …

[252] Syal, 73.

[253] Syal, 73.

> Buildings previously housing battalions of nimble-fingered women became music stores, supermarkets, boutiques, bars; … Streets were rechristened with names like Imran's … And in 1998, he sold his business premises to a young Bengali man who did not look like the entrepreneur he claimed to be - too much gel in the hair, too flashy a car to be decent - but who paid, like all the previous owners, in crisp, fresh notes.[254]

As stated in the introduction, immigrants remap the city and the passage quoted above illustrates that the postcolonial metropolis is also always in motion and easily transformable thanks to them. Indeed, as Gunning argues, it is here where Syal plots 'the ways the East End changes from being part of a nineteenth-century British landscape to a place changing under the impacts brought about by the successive Jewish and Asian migrations, and most recently becoming the dwelling place of a confident British-born Asian community'.[255] In consequence, the building of The Buzz Bar becomes a microcosm of London as a metropolis that has always relied on and prospered from migration when it comes to its development and it symbolises 'the multi-ethnic background in which the characters live'.[256] Arguably, a similar changeability of London is apparent in other postcolonial novels, such as *The Satanic Verses*. In Rushdie's novel, the character of Gibreel finds London's streets to be 'vague' and 'amorphous'; he views it as a city with many 'layers of history and identity' that is in 'endless transformation and mutation'.[257] That is to say, London in *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* is, exactly like in *The Satanic Verses*, depicted as a hybrid space shaped and transformed by its long history of immigration.[258] Moreover, this history of immigration is seen as very positive. Indeed, Syal's novel definitely celebrates immigrants as a good influence on London and its

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[254] Syal, 155.

[255] Gunning, 113.

[256] Gunning, 113.

Cecilia Rosa Acquarone, *Barriers, Borders and Crossings in British Postcolonial Fiction: A Gender Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013) 166.

[257] Cristina Sandru, *Worlds Apart? A Postcolonial Reading of post-1945 East-Central European Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012) 205.

Rushdie, 459.

[258] Guignery, 161.

landscape and reminds us that the metropolis could not be as vibrant and culturally rich without immigration.

5. Conclusion

We discover that all of the characters in our discussion have hybrid identities because they straddle two cultures. The first generation immigrants are always deeply attached to many traditions from their countries of origin that they often continue to practice in London but they also embrace some aspects of British culture. The second generation immigrants then negotiate between their sense of Britishness and their cultural roots that are an inherent part of their identities in the metropolis. The thesis then shows that it is the hybridity of all of these characters that makes it impossible for them to find full belonging in the Western metropolis and that forces them to develop various coping mechanisms. In case of the first generation immigrants, we identify a couple of different strategies - some of them stay in London despite their alienation because they recognise that it is beneficial for them as individuals (Nazneen, Alsana, Clara), others resist the city by open criticism and by considering East to be a superior place (Chanu, Samad) and some become so disillusioned by London that they completely abandon the metropolis in order to return to their imaginary homeland (Chanu). The hybrid second generation immigrants also exemplify several options of how to deal with their feelings of alienation in London: some of them, despite the struggles it brings, acknowledge their hybridity as a fact and want to continue living in the Western metropolis (Shahana, Bibi, Sunita, Tania), others leave London and explore their parental countries of origin in hope to find full belonging there (Karim, Irie, Chila) and some stay in London but choose to reject their cultural surroundings (Millat). Interestingly, we observe that the first generation immigrant women in our chosen novels are those more likely to take chances and embrace the metropolis while their partners are seen as always unhappy with their location and often in complete psychological retreat. When it comes to the second generation immigrants, both men and women are always willing to take risks while forming their identities in the West, even if it means leaving London.

The thesis discovers that apart from generational differences, gender also influences the experience of the urban space in the chosen novels. Irrespective of the generation they come from, all the male characters can move around the city and they are not associated specifically with either the private or the public sphere. In other words, the men in our analysis always move between the two spheres freely and, as a result, they have quite a lot of

contact with London. However, this is not the case of all of the female characters. The women in our discussion that are first generation immigrants of the South Asian diaspora - Nazneen and Alsana - continue to be influenced by very traditional gender roles that they grew up with in Bangladesh. These women and their husbands reterritorialise the familial pattern from their homeland that puts women into the roles of submissive housewives and mothers even in the Western metropolis and results in them being largely confined to the private sphere. However, as was shown in the discussion, London eventually becomes a site for emancipation and self-exploration for these females, which allows them to rebel against the patriarchal set up of their marriages and may even lead to their heightened engagement with the public sphere, as we saw in the analysis of Nazneen. Even Clara, the first generation immigrant from Jamaica who marries a white British man, stays mostly in the domestic sphere as a mother. In Clara's case, her position is caused by her decision to adhere to the role she thinks she should have according to the patriarchal values she was raised with. For second generation women, gender may also become a factor that reflects in their contact with London. We see characters such as Chila and Sunita who, despite being second generation immigrants, spend a lot of their time in the private sphere of their homes because they give in and perform the roles that their cultural roots and patriarchal families and husbands impose on them. What then surfaces as an interesting observation in our analysis is the fact that the only women who do not ever seem to have any spatial restrictions and move freely within the public as well as the private sphere of London are those second generation immigrants who remain unmarried and/or stand up to the patriarchal values of their families from a very young age, such as Bibi, Shahana, Irie and Tania.

The analysis also shows that the simple act of walking around the postcolonial city can help immigrants to construct their identities in the West or at least assist them in the negotiations of their cultural and spatial belongings. The most obvious example of this is Nazneen whose flânerie is absolutely crucial in the development of her hybrid identity. However, walking in the city is also important for Millat who rejects Western culture during his stroll around Soho and for Tania whose walk around the city centre assures her that she does not feel happy in East London. It is usually the passages that depict individual characters moving through the city that show that London is full of diverse areas. Indeed, there are whole neighbourhoods that are reterritorialised by large immigrant populations and these

districts stand visually and culturally in contrast to the centre of the city that is inhabited mostly by white Britons. As a result, the novels provide us with the image of London as a very exciting place that both connects and separates different types of Londoners. Such variety of spaces and inhabitants that can be found in the metropolis then allows for the carnivalesque to emerge. *White Teeth* is the book where we see the carnivalesque the most clearly because it presents Millat and Samad whose acts hint at the possibility of the reversal of roles between the immigrants and the hegemonic culture. However, all the three books portray at least one of the features of the carnivalesque as they stress the multivocality of the urban space. Moreover, it must be noted that the three novels, that all draw inspiration from London of relatively recent years, generally celebrate multiculturalism in the city and illustrate its positives. They show that coexistence and mixing of several cultures in one geographical location can enrich all of the cultures involved. While the immigrants in the books often adopt the lifestyle of the white British for their own benefit, the hegemonic culture is also portrayed to learn from its contact with the immigrants or even prosper from it, as we saw in the analysis of Tania's economic success and Poppy Burt-Jones' keen interest in Indian music and customs. After all, this trend is still visible in contemporary popular culture in the West that has created mainstream exoticism and continues to actively embrace foreign traditions, meals and clothing and makes them fashionable and marketable to the white population. Nevertheless, while multiculturalism can be inclusive, enriching and mutually beneficial, it is also potentially exclusionary. The novels touch upon this by illustrating the topics of alienation, social disadvantage, racism and marginalisation that immigrants endure in multicultural areas like London. In consequence, we find that the chosen books point out the paradoxes of multiculturalism in today's Western society where masses of white people appropriate foreign cultures, enjoy and cash in on exoticism but at the same time may take a negative stance towards immigration.

To summarise, *Brick Lane*, *White Teeth* and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* focus on identity formations of immigrants in London and provide images of how they reimagine, view and navigate their urban surroundings. Our analysis then points out London's status of a global city where people from all over the world come to live and turn it into a stage on which they perform their identities. It becomes clear during the discussion that the presence of immigrants in the streets of London as well as their cultural roots influence them and the

constructions of their identities because all humans are ‘a complex collision of inheritance and environment’.[259] Nevertheless, the thesis in its entirety also seeks to stress that immigrants have the power to influence the hegemonic culture in return and leave visible and significant traces on the urban space of London, which turns it into a very vibrant and culturally rich metropolis but also produces its typical socio-ethnic polarities.

[259] Syal, 99.

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